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The New York Times
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Dark clouds as a storm is gathering

Bret Stephens

OPINION

Shortly after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, I wrote a column under the headline “This Is How World War III Begins.” More than four years on, I wonder how much I got right.

My argument was based on the origins of World War II, which did not simply start with Germany’s invasion of Poland on Sept. 1, 1939. Instead, the war was an accumulation of regional wars and crises, beginning with Japan’s invasion of Manchuria in 1931, which gradually gathered into a single global conflict.

That gathering, abetted by the converging ambitions of the totalitarian states and the divisions and vacillations of the democracies, led to catastrophe. Added to this was a revolution in military technology and tactics that gave the dictatorships an early advantage in offensive combat. Also an advantage: their willingness to inflict — and endure — a level of brutality and suffering their adversaries were initially reluctant to match.

Spheres of conflict have multiplied and are merging. Has World War III already started?

In 2022, I saw a similar pattern unfolding: Decades of Western appeasement of Vladimir Putin had given the Russian strongman a sense that he could get away with nearly anything. His burgeoning ties with North Korea, Iran and especially China — memorialized by the pledge of a “no limits” partnership with Beijing announced weeks before the invasion — gave him additional confidence. So did the spectacle of American weakness during our shambolic withdrawal from Afghanistan just six months earlier.

But Ukraine did not, as I had feared, turn out to be the France of 1940. It was more like Britain, prepared to fight, as Churchill put it that May, “however long and hard the road may be.” The Biden administration, for all its fatal hesitation about letting Kyiv take the war to Russia, at least helped ensure that Ukraine didn’t lose. Ukraine has also held the technological edge, pioneering equipment and tactics that are finally stimulating a long-overdue rethink about how wars of the future will be fought.

STEPHENS, PAGE 11

The New York Times publishes opinion from a wide range of perspectives in hopes of promoting constructive debate about consequential questions.

LISI NIESNER/REUTERS

A wheat field in Germany. Heat and drought have reduced harvests in the United States and Europe this year, and low water levels have affected transit routes like the Rhine River.

Wheat is getting pounded

Prices could spike as world’s breadbaskets confront war, weather and trade disputes

BY SOMINI SENGUPTA

Instant noodles. Hot chapatis. Sliced bread.

Wheat is at the heart of the modern diet, and this year, it is facing an accumulation of modern dangers. The breadbaskets of the world are getting pummeled by drone strikes and devilish weather, nudging prices higher amid already soaring food costs in the wake of the Iran war.

Heat and drought have diminished harvests in some of the biggest wheat-producing countries, including the United States, which is expected to have its worst wheat harvest in a half-century, spiking prices.

Poor countries that agreed to buy American wheat under the threat of Trump tariffs could be stuck paying abnormally high prices.

The Black Sea, a crucial passage for the global wheat trade, is an active theater of the Russia-Ukraine war, while the Houthi militia’s attacks on shipping in the Red Sea have already forced grain shipments to take a longer, more expensive route around South Africa.

Beyond that, a supercharged El Niño further threatens water levels in the Panama Canal, while drought has reduced water levels to perilously low levels in transit routes like the Rhine and Danube rivers in Europe, raising transportation costs.

All this at a time when the global atmosphere is hotter than normal because of a century of fossil fuel burning, threatening the livelihoods of small farmers in poor countries.

DAVID GUTTENFELDER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Ukrainian soldiers in an unharvested wheat field. Shipments from Russia and Ukraine, which supply nearly a third of the world’s wheat, have nearly ground to a halt this year.

The simultaneous troubles reveal the risks inherent in the global food system today. Only a few crops, like wheat, provide most of the world’s calories. Relatively few governments dominate the export of wheat, including Russia, Canada, the United States, Ukraine and the European Union. Their customers are mainly low-income countries that no longer grow much of the food their people eat.

“The system we currently have in place depends on three things: seamless trade, cheap energy, stable climate,” said Evan Fraser, a professor who studies the global food system at the University of Guelph in Ontario. “Today, it seems none of these assumptions are met.”

Few things are as politically potent as the price of bread, and wheat prices were already at a three-year high in July, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization. The U.N. agency has warned of higher prices later this year.

The saving grace is that the world had a bumper crop of wheat last year, and global stocks remain strong. The risk, said Monika Tothova, an economist who specializes in commodities at the Food and Agriculture Organization, is that “several sources of uncertainty begin to reinforce one another.”

“A combination of El Niño-related weather impacts across major exporters, renewed constraints on Black Sea exports and further disruptions to key shipping routes would have implications far beyond wheat production itself,” she said.

Russia and Ukraine together account for nearly a third of the wheat that the world buys. This year, just as harvests began, their grain shipments have nearly ground to a halt.

In recent weeks, both Russia and Ukraine have stepped up their attacks on each other’s grain export terminals

HARVESTS, PAGE 8

Deference to Trump gives way to defiance

NEWS ANALYSIS

President is still dominant, but at home and abroad, many are pushing back

BY PETER BAKER

This is a summer movie that’s been seen before: President Trump makes demands. When the other side does not give him what he wants, he escalates with bombastic threats of crippling punishment. The other side surrenders.

Except that Mark Carney, the prime minister of Canada, evidently has not read the script. His refusal to buckle in the face of Mr. Trump’s trade ultimatum even at the cost of retaliatory tariffs has flipped the narrative of the president’s second term. Instead of giving in, Mr. Carney is testing whether defiance is a viable strategy against Mr. Trump.

The age of capitulation that defined Mr. Trump’s return to office may be starting to fade. World leaders and domestic institutions are, in some cases at least, showing less willingness to submit to Mr. Trump’s will. European leaders have refused to join his war with Iran. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel flatly rejected his Gaza plan. Gulf Arab states forced him to abandon plans to charge a shipping toll in the Strait of Hormuz.

Universities and law firms are rebuffing his directives rather than signing on the bottom line. Bond markets are rebelling against his fiscal policies. Even the ABC television network, whose $16 million payment to settle a Trump lawsuit was seen as an early example of yielding to the president, has discovered that it did not buy peace and is now suing his administration for threatening its broadcast licenses.

None of which means that Mr. Trump should be underestimated. Although his poll numbers are at or near historic lows, he remains the most dominant figure on the planet, able to reset the terms of the global conversation on a whim with a social media post and unafraid of wielding power in ways that his predecessors did not.

He may yet bring Canada and Israel to heel through force of personality, tariffs or other means. The U.S. Supreme Court has given him one free pass after another to use his executive authority as he sees fit, whether it be taking control of independent agencies, building his cherished ballroom or trying to crack down on mail-in voting.

And every time someone predicts that Republicans in Congress will finally begin exhibiting some independence, they prove the prognosticators wrong. While they have resisted his pressure in some instances lately, Senate confirmation of Todd Blanche as attorney general made clear that he still dominates his party’s congressional wing.

TRUMP, PAGE 5

JACK MANNING/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Dolly Parton in 1975. Alluding to her appearance, she once said: “Hopefully people can see beneath the hair to know there’s a brain, beneath the boobs to know there’s a heart and behind all the other stuff to know there’s some talent.”

Rhinestone-studded star lit up millions of hearts

DOLLY PARTON
1946-2026

BY BILL FRISKICS-WARREN

Dolly Parton, a rhinestone-studded, rags-to-riches daughter of Appalachia who for six decades ruled country music — and much of pop culture — with an outsize personality and down-home wit that enshrined her as one of America’s most cherished originals, died on Tuesday in Nashville. She was 80.

Her death was announced in a video posted on social media by her nephew Bryan Seaver. A spokesman said she died after a brief battle with cancer. Concerns about Ms. Parton’s health were raised last year as she postponed and later canceled a Las Vegas residency, and intensified to the point that she took to social media in October to announce, “I ain’t dead yet.” In May, she said that she had responded well to treatment after her immune and digestive systems had, as she put it, “got all out of whack” in recent years.

From her hardscrabble beginnings to glittering stardom, Ms. Parton’s life was the stuff of make-believe. With her voluptuous figure, sparkly stage costumes and blond bouffant wigs, she was likened by the writer Chet Flippo to the Big Rock Candy Mountain, the Depression-era symbol of abundance. Her songs spoke to millions, confronting privation and loss even as they radiated possibility and hope.

She was, quintessentially, a uniter of people. In 2019, The New York Times ran a story with the headline “Is There Anything We Can All Agree On? Yes: Dolly Parton.”

Ms. Parton cannily exploited — and transcended — rural stereotypes and kitsch to fashion a folksy chic entirely her own. (“A country girl’s idea of glam,” she called it in the song “Backwoods

DOLLY PARTON, PAGE 2

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PAGE TWO

Country music star's songs spoke to millions

JASON KEMPIN/GETTY IMAGES

Dolly Parton onstage in Nashville last year. In 2019, The New York Times published an article with the headline, "Is There Anything We Can All Agree On? Yes: Dolly Parton."

DOLLY PARTON, FROM PAGE 1

Barbie.") In the process, she became an international celebrity who headlined stadium tours, starred in Hollywood movies, built a business empire and appeared on the cover of Rolling Stone. Her at times girlish soprano notwithstanding, she was anything but the "dumb blonde" invoked in the title of her 1966 single.

"I've created this and played it up — the makeup, the whole persona," Ms. Parton said, alluding to her plastic surgeries as well as her colloquial "Dollyisms" in a 2002 interview with The Times.

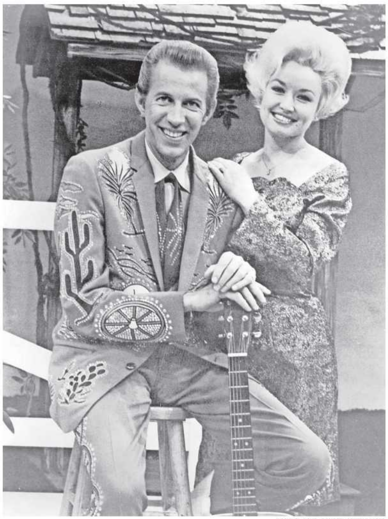
"But this isn't all I am," she added. "It's not even most of what I am. Hopefully people can see beneath the hair to know there's a brain, beneath the boobs to know there's a heart and behind all the other stuff to know there's some talent."

Inducted into both the country music and rock 'n' roll halls of fame, Ms. Parton was the top-ranking female singer on country radio from 1967 to 1993, and had a total of 25 No. 1 country singles.

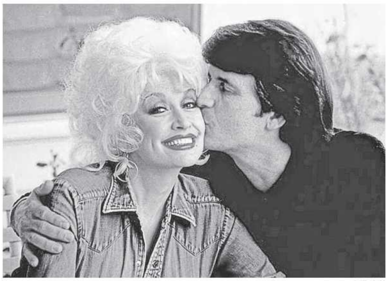
Her early breakthrough came in 1967 when she was hired as the "girl singer" on "The Porter Wagoner Show," a syndicated country music television variety program. Several years later, she had No. 1 country hits with records like "Jolene" and "I Will Always Love You."

Both songs were among about 3,000 titles she published in her lifetime, hundreds of which have been recorded by other artists, including Tina Turner, Norah Jones, the White Stripes, Merle Haggard, RuPaul and Whitney Houston.

Featured in the 1992 movie "The Bodyguard," Ms. Houston's version of "I Will Always Love You" spent 14 weeks at the top of the pop chart. The song had previously been a No. 1 country single twice, with versions released by Ms. Parton in 1974 and 1982.



MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



INSTAGRAM

Clockwise from left: Ms. Parton with Porter Wagoner in 1967, the year she was hired as the "girl singer" on his country music television show; with Carl Dean, her husband, whom she married in 1966; and albums that Ms. Parton released in 2024 and 1974.

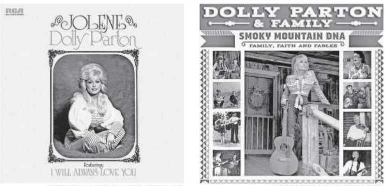


PHOTO BY DONALDSON COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES

OWEPAR RECORDS, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

With Loretta Lynn and Tammy Wynette, Ms. Parton blazed a trail for women in country music, inspiring contemporaries like Linda Ronstadt and Emmylou Harris, as well as latter-day hitmakers like Carrie Underwood, Kacey Musgraves and Taylor Swift. She recorded a pair of albums, "Trio" and "Trio II," with Ms. Ronstadt and Ms. Harris.

Stylistically, Ms. Parton's music ran the gamut: mountain bluegrass and soul-inflected countrypolitan, disco-era pop and covers of classic rock touchstones written by Neil Young and Led Zeppelin — all of it rendered indelible by her irrepressible spirit and alternately keening and gossamer soprano drawl.

She wrote unabashedly, in simple Southern vernacular, about growing up as the daughter of an illiterate sharecropper.

"I've seen Daddy's hands break open and bleed / And I've seen him work 'til he's stiff as a board," she sang over wistful harmonica and acoustic guitar in "In the Good Old Days (When Times Were Bad)." "I've seen Mama layin' in sufferin' and sickness / In need of a doctor we couldn't afford. / Anything at all was more than we had / In the good old days when times were bad."

In "Coat of Many Colors," maybe her most beloved original, Ms. Parton plumbed childhood feelings of pride and humiliation. In this case, the coat in question — quilted from rags and originally a source of delight and the expression of a mother's love — becomes an object of ridicule when Dolly's classmates poke fun at her for wearing it to school.

So with patches on my britches
And holes in both my shoes,
In my coat of many colors
I hurried off to school
Just to find the others laughing
And making fun of me
In my coat of many colors
My Mama made for me

"That little song is like a world of things," Ms. Parton said of "Coat of Many Colors" in "Dolly Parton, Songteller: My Life in Lyrics" (2020), written with Robert K. Oermann. "It teaches about bullying, about love, about acceptance, about good parents. That little story has even been written into a schoolbook to teach children about being different."

Empathy was a hallmark of Ms. Parton's songwriting, perhaps nowhere so much as in "Down From Dover" and "Daddy Come Get Me," harrowing Southern gothic ballads about teen pregnancy and how patriarchy blames and victimizes young women.

Assertive women populated Ms. Parton's songs, whether through her protofeminist rewrite of Jimmie Rodgers's "Mule Skinner Blues (Blue Yodel No. 8)" or by advocating parity in the bedroom ("Touch Your Woman") and in the workplace ("9 to 5").

"It's a rich man's game / No matter what they call it / And you spend your life / Putting money in his wallet," Ms. Parton sang, with a mixture of fury and resolve, in the 1980 pink-collar comedy "9 to 5." Besides writing and performing the movie's theme song, a No. 1 pop and country hit, she also starred in the film as a beleaguered secretary drudging for a sexist boss, alongside Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin.

Ms. Parton would go on to star in other films, among them "The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas" (1982), with Burt Reynolds; "Steel Magnolias" (1989), with Julia Roberts and Shirley MacLaine; and "Straight Talk" (1992), with James Woods.

In 1976, she became the first woman in country music to host her own syndicated TV series; a decade later, she had an hourlong variety show on ABC. But for all her reach and command as an entertainer — including her ubiquitous appearances on TV talk shows and specials — Ms. Parton viewed herself, first and foremost, as a songwriter.

"Writing's just as natural to me as getting up and cooking breakfast," she told The Times in 2002. "I ain't never far away from a pencil and paper or a tape recorder. I write every day, even when I'm on a plane, in the tub or on the bus. It burns in me."

Dolly Rebecca Parton was born on Jan. 19, 1946, the fourth of 12 children of Robert Lee and Avie Lee (Owens) Parton, in a one-room cabin on the banks of the Little Pigeon River in Sevier County, Tenn.

Her father was a tenant farmer, and her mother was a homemaker who sang old Anglo-Celtic ballads and hymns while doing housework.

The Partons were so poor that Dolly's father had to pay the doctor who attended her birth with a sack of cornmeal. Ms. Parton may have grown up without plumbing, heat, electricity and other modern conveniences, but she always insisted that she had grown up happy, and that music had offered her a refuge from want.

"Most of us in the household learned to play early on," she said in "Dolly Parton, Songteller."

When she was 5 or so, she wrote her first song, a ditty about a corncob doll with corn-silk hair called "Little Tiny Tasseltop." She started singing on radio and on TV at 10, on the "Cas Walker Farm and Home Hour" in Knoxville, securing bookings with the help of her uncle Bill Owens, who also bought her her first guitar. The two would go on to write many songs together.

Ms. Parton made her recording debut in 1959, the same year she made her first appearance at the Grand Ole Opry. In 1962, she signed a songwriting deal with Tree International Publishing (now part of Sony Music Publishing).

Two years later, she became the first person in her family to graduate from high school.

In 1966, Ms. Parton married Carl Dean, an asphalt contractor who shunned the limelight. The couple had met two years earlier, at a laundromat in Nashville, when Ms. Parton was 18. Mr. Dean died in 2025.

Ms. Parton is survived by six of her siblings: Willadeene Parton, Robert Lee Parton Jr., Stella Parton, Cassie Parton, Freida Parton and Rachel Ann Parton George.

In 1965, Ms. Parton signed a recording contract with Monument Records, not long before she and her uncle wrote two Top 10 country songs for the singer Bill Phillips. She released the first of her roughly 90 Top 40 country hits — "Dumb Blonde," a plucky denunciation of female stereotypes — in 1966.

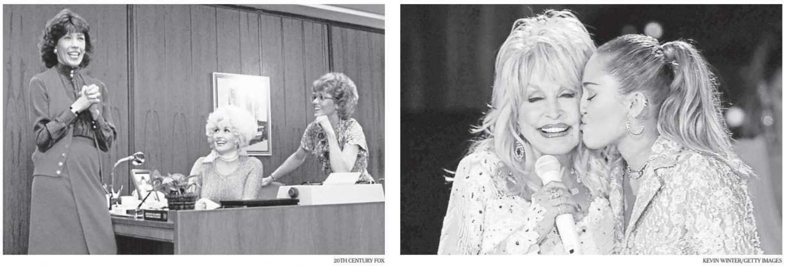
In 1967, she began her seven-year tenure with "The Porter Wagoner Show." She and Mr. Wagoner would go on to release 21 hit duets together, including "Holding On to Nothin'" (1968) and "Just Someone I Used to Know" (1969).

But with the arrival of the 1970s — and in no small part because of the national exposure she received on Mr. Wagoner's show — Ms. Parton started to eclipse her employer in popularity.

The tension that resulted was further aggravated when she began steadily producing No. 1 country singles like "Joshua" and "Jolene." Ms. Parton parted ways with Mr. Wagoner in 1974 to concentrate on her solo career, but not before writing "I Will Always Love You" as an expression of gratitude and farewell.

Time and again in her career, Ms. Parton reflected on her impoverished upbringing and how she had followed her dreams to escape it. "I wanted to be free," she told Rolling Stone in 1977. "I had my songs to sing, I had an ambition, and it burned inside me."

She added: "It was something I knew would take me out of the mountains. I knew I could see worlds beyond the Smoky Mountains."



20TH CENTURY FOX

KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES

Above left, Ms. Parton with Lily Tomlin, left, and Jane Fonda in 1980 in the movie "9 to 5." She also wrote and performed the film's theme song, which was a No. 1 pop and country hit. Above right, with her goddaughter, Miley Cyrus, at the Grammy Awards in 2019. Over her career, Ms. Parton was nominated for more than 50 Grammys, winning 10 of them.

Study finds misuse of cannabis on rise in U.S.

BY RONI CARYN RABIN

A growing number of Americans say their cannabis use is problematic, according to a large new study released this month.

The study, based on nationally representative data of U.S. adults, found that more than 9 percent of the men — or almost 1 in 10 — reported symptoms of cannabis use disorder in 2024, up from about 7 percent in 2021. The prevalence of cannabis use disorder also rose among women, increasing to nearly 6 percent in 2024, up from about 5 percent in 2021. Symptoms of the disorder include not being able to cut back or quit, or continuing to use the drug despite it leading to interpersonal problems.

"The notion that cannabis is not addictive may basically be incorrect," said Dr. Nora D. Volkow, the director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the paper's senior author.

She said the fact that many cannabis products now contained much higher amounts than in the past of tetrahydrocannabinol or THC, the psychoactive compound in cannabis, was making problematic use of the drug more visible.

"It's a completely different story," Dr. Volkow said, adding, "The dosing is actually enabling us to see the emergence of the addictiveness. The higher the content of the drug, the higher the risk for addiction."

Overall, cannabis use rose among all adults during this time. In 2024, 26 percent of men reported using the drug, up from 22 percent in 2021. Among women, 21 percent said they used cannabis in 2024, up from nearly 18 percent in 2021.

Dr. Volkow said especially striking was that the risk of cannabis use disorder was so high. Of the survey participants who said they used cannabis, about 30 percent showed symptoms consistent with cannabis use disorder. Those findings suggested that those who used cannabis were at higher risk of developing problematic use than those who drank alcohol.

ADRIENNE GRUNWALD FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Many cannabis products now contain much higher amounts of tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, than in the past.

The paper, published in the journal JAMA Psychiatry, drew on figures from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, which asked the participants to report on their past year's drug use. The annual survey is conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Experts on cannabis said they were not surprised by the data, given that many states now allow recreational use of cannabis, and most allow medical use.

"This study highlights an anticipated consequence of rising levels of use and increasing potency of the product," said Dr. Daniel Myran, an assistant professor of family medicine at University of Ottawa who studies health outcomes associated with cannabis use. "The product is really changing under enormous pressure from market forces to increase the THC content."

There is no treatment for cannabis use disorder that is approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and the treatments that are available are limited. These include therapies like cognitive behavior therapy, as well as medications to reduce cravings and help manage withdrawal symptoms.

The prevalence of moderate-to-severe cannabis use disorder also rose. In 2024, about 4 percent of men and just under 3 percent of women reported symptoms of the moderate to severe form of the disorder.

The researchers classified survey participants as having a moderate to severe cannabis use disorder if they reported at least four out of 11 symptoms. Users who reported two or three symptoms were considered to have mild cannabis use disorder.

Some of the steepest increases in the prevalence of both mild cannabis use disorder and the more severe form occurred among men and women 35 to 49 and men 50 and older.

Dr. Laura Bierut, a professor of psychiatry at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, expressed concern that cannabis use in midlife and older age could be damaging to the aging brain.

"Usually what happens with substance use disorder is that people go through this period and then they mature — they get a job and they have kids," Dr. Bierut said. "This group of 35- to 49-year-olds have children, teenage kids and adolescents who are going to be seeing their parents having a substance use disorder and boy, that's not a good role model. That worries me."

World

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ILVY NJIOKIKTJIEN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Taking photos at sunset in The Hague last month. While it is perhaps best known as a center for justice and politics, The Hague also has a sandy coastline and a quaint city center.

A cool stretch in The Hague

THE HAGUE DISPATCH

As southern Europe broils, Dutch city attracts tourists seeking a milder climate

BY JENNA SMIALEK

A woman sprawled on a lounger under a beach umbrella sips from a pitcher of sangria. Sailboats dot the bright horizon, and steel drum music streams from a nearby restaurant. The tang of coconut sunscreen lingers on the salty breeze.

Just down the beach, tourists zip-line, sunbathe and eat soft serve on a pier. A surf school attracts visitors from around Europe. The boardwalk is a swirl of languages — Dutch, English, French, German, Spanish.

This vacation hot spot isn't Mykonos. Nor is it Porto, Malaga or Mallorca.

It's The Hague, the seat of government for the Netherlands and the home of the International Criminal Court, and it's a prime example of where to have a "coolcation" in an increasingly sweaty Europe.

Although perhaps most commonly known as a center of justice and politics, The Hague is home to seven miles (11 kilometers) of sandy coastline along the North Sea, along with a quaint city center with cobbled streets, scenic canals and art galleries. It has long been popular with Dutch and German visitors.

Now the city is also attracting tourists from other parts of Europe who are seeking sandy beaches without sweltering temperatures. Madrid and Paris, for example, have exceeded 100 degrees Fahrenheit during heat waves this summer, and parts of France and Spain have fought huge wildfires. The Hague usually has summer highs in the 60s or 70s Fahrenheit (around 15 to 25 Celsius), though the temperature has crept into the 90s, (above 32 Celsius) some days this summer.

Returning from surfing in The Hague. As visitor numbers grow, officials say they want to avoid overtourism while retaining the city's appeal to "stijlzoekers," or "style seekers."

"We don't go south now because it's too hot," said Mathias Streit, 31, who had traveled north from Bern, Switzerland, and was recently taking a guided tour through The Hague with his mother. The mere idea of being on a 100-degree beach in Spain or Italy was "terrible," he added.

By contrast, the cooler Hague, he said, was "perfect."

He's not alone. About 16 percent of people in a recent survey by the European Travel Commission, which promotes tourism on the continent, said they were seeking destinations with milder weather. Those can include beaches on Europe's northern coastline, like in The Hague, and in Scandinavia.

Visits to The Hague, measured by overnight stays, are up by nearly 60 percent over the past decade, based on data provided by local officials. Visits from Italy and Spain are up 9 percent over the past two years, while visits overall in that period are up 7 percent, the local data show.

Hague officials say they are wary of what increased tourism could bring, particularly the overcrowding that has plagued destinations in southern Europe. They do not want The Hague to become a bachelor party magnet like Amsterdam, a 40-minute train ride away.

"We have a completely different image, and we cherish that image," Marco Esser, the director of The Hague & Partners, the city's marketing agency, said in an interview in the carefully landscaped courtyard of a coffee shop. This city, as he describes it, is "high-class."

His colleagues say they're hoping to bring in the "stijlzoekers," or "style seekers."

Jasper van der Hoek, the founder of Patagonia Beach, a beach club on the northern part of The Hague's long line of beaches, said his guests tended to be "elegant." They are often local or regional regulars seeking sea bass and oysters, not chicken fingers, he noted.

To avoid unchecked tourism, the city has rules to limit Airbnbs. New hotels can gain approval, but city officials said those approvals were limited to avoid expanding the market too much. The city's marketing agency spends its budget on talking up a surf championship in the autumn and Christmas markets in the winter, rather than on attracting people during the summer.

The goal, several local officials said, is to keep the number of tourists coming during the height of summer fairly steady while driving visitor numbers during the adjacent seasons.

Eliza Bol, a spokeswoman for the municipality, said in an email that the policy would avoid "giving the market free rein and risking overtourism."

So far, it seems to be working. Over a weekend this summer, the city's galleries and shopping streets were bustling, while dozens of surfers caught waves at the beach, and trendy restaurants were fully booked. But you could get a walk-in table at most standard brasseries and sushi spots.

Museums were a hotter ticket. The Mauritshuis, home to Vermeer's "Girl With a Pearl Earring," was out of open slots.

Simone Hollen, who manages international sales at the Mauritshuis, said that most visitors were still Dutch or German, but that tourists from France, Italy, Spain and elsewhere were making up a "new market."

Heena Jethwa, who is from Yorkshire, England, and has lived in The Hague for two decades, was walking on the city's pier with her daughter and friends visiting from Britain.

The city, she said, "seems to be more touristy." She said that during the latest heat wave, the beach had been packed, which she saw as a good thing.

Paul Schuitema, who runs a surf school and shop in the beach area of Scheveningen, said his business had long welcomed a solid number of international guests. But he noted that he increasingly heard people talking about how they had come to northern Europe to avoid the heat.

Higher temperatures and drought are leaving a mark in the Netherlands, too. In The Hague, Els 't Hooft, a tour guide, pointed to a patch of yellow grass near a monument to Spinoza, a philosopher from the 1600s. "To see yellow grass in my country," she said. "It is not something I grew up with."

Martin Wörsdörfer, who works to promote the interests of local beach bars, said the area's growing appeal was obvious.

"Look at our beach," he said. "It's Spain" — just without the 100-degree weather.

Groceries scarce in Ukraine's shops

KYIV, UKRAINE

Russian missile attacks on warehouses leave shelves of stores bare

BY KIM BARKER
AND OLEKSANDRA MYKOLYSHYN

There was no disguising the gaps in the usually well-stocked shelves of the Silpo supermarket in Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital, last week. They had no barley, buckwheat, quinoa or rice. No spring onions or packaged lettuce, and just one lonely, wilted bunch of cilantro.

For the first time since the initial months after the 2022 invasion, the city's residents are experiencing shortages of a wide range of grocery staples because of Russian ballistic missile strikes on critical distribution centers.

"It's a nightmare, a nightmare," said a Silpo shopper, Nina Kirichuk, 67, a retired hairdresser, her cart carrying bread and two kinds of herring. "I'm horrified. I wanted to buy sugar, but I looked and there wasn't any. And there's an entire section over there that's completely empty. I didn't even go in there. I don't want to look at it and upset myself."

Moscow's missiles struck at least four warehouses for one supermarket supply company on Aug. 5, killing at least six workers and severely disrupting the supply of food to multiple store chains. The effects have been felt mainly in the capital, but also in far-flung places like Zaporizhzhia in southeastern Ukraine.

Early last Thursday, Russia again targeted food warehouses near Kyiv, although the extent of the damage from the missile strikes was not yet clear.

Missiles have also destroyed a warehouse for another supermarket chain; a distribution center for Rozetka, on online shopping site; and a sorting center for Ukraine's national postal service. Warehouses of major Ukrainian book publishers have been repeatedly hit this summer.

The attacks have come as the air war has intensified, with Ukraine building up its offensive capabilities and Russia taking advantage of Ukraine's dwindling air defenses.

In the first few years after Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, the Kremlin asserted that it hit only military-related targets in Ukraine, even as it pummeled cities and the power grid. Now it has dropped that pretense.

Ukraine still maintains that it avoids civilian targets, though it has deployed its long-range drones against Russia's oil industry, the engine of the Russian economy. Recently, it has also hit warehouses of Wildberries, Russia's version of Amazon, claiming many of its products have military applications.

For years, fully stocked Ukrainian supermarkets have been a symbol of how the country has done its best to preserve normal life through bombardment.

But in recent days, grocery chains admitted shortages. Supplies of dairy products, meat and fresh produce have dwindled. At a corner shop in Kyiv, the only produce remaining were six mushy avocados and the papery skins of a few onions and garlic bulbs. Specialty items like ramen had disappeared from another store, along with paper plates and plastic cutlery.

"Am I the only one these empty shelves are starting to make panic?" an aspiring beauty influencer posted on social media, adding that she had bought the last four packs of baby formula at one store after striking out at another.

Svitlana Petrychuk, 56, said she was most worried that she would not be able to buy a certain brand of dog food for her Yorkshire terrier, Lord. Ms. Petrychuk got Lord about two and a half years ago, after suffering a stroke in the aftermath of three nearby Russian drone strikes. Her doctor suggested that a dog might relieve stress.

"The shortages in warehouses and the fact that some food is currently missing from supermarket shelves worries me much less," Ms. Petrychuk said. "We, as people, can easily make do with whatever food is available."

Luckily for Lord, she found the dog food at the second store she checked.

On social media, some Ukrainians joked about the return of the Soviet Union. Before its breakup in 1991, such shortages were common.

Some older customers remember famines throughout Ukraine's history as if they happened yesterday, and have stockpiled canned foods and staples like sugar, pasta and flour.

"I could live for an entire month without buying anything, except bread," said Olha Sliusarenko, 76, who made a practice of stockpiling well before the war.

The Silpo supermarket chain has tried to address the shortages with Ukraine's typical stoicism and dark humor, blaming Russia while also telling people to just hold on. Orange-and-white signs display poems about the hardship, with blank spaces where customers can write their own reactions.

"Russia ___ probably ___ hoped this would be our end ___ and bring only sorrow but here we have anger ___ new ideas and ___ gratitude ___ for our people," one sign said.

Another said: "#@%# who know only how ___ to burn things unfortunately ___ they burned these products but everyone who creates ___ and nurtures is already bringing ___ new ones here."

Novus, another supermarket chain, posted a simpler sign near its empty shelf of milk in a store in Kyiv. "This product has been destroyed from russia," it said, not even granting that country a capital R. "New packages are on the way."

VALENTYN OGIRENKO/REUTERS

Smoke from a Russian strike on a food warehouse in Kyiv, Ukraine. Supplies of dairy products, meat and fresh produce have dwindled in Kyiv and in other parts of Ukraine.

Bird flu in Australia: Mass mortality and infected mammals

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

BY LAURA CHUNG

Bird flu is sweeping across Australia, devastating its unique birds and mammals, many of which are found nowhere else in the world.

Already, mass mortality events have killed more than 1,000 birds, and the disease has crossed into seals. Experts fear that more deaths are likely.

What is happening to bird populations in Australia?

Australia confirmed its first case of H5N1 in June in a migratory brown skua, a sub-Antarctic species on the country's southern coast. Since then, the disease has rapidly spread.

To date, there have been 309 confirmed bird flu events, official data shows (the country is not counting individual bird cases, instead referring to events that could include one or more birds). Among the bird species to have died are greater crested terns, silver gulls (commonly known as seagulls) and little penguins.

The state of South Australia has been hit the hardest, recording 194 events. More than 1,000 crested terns — a large coastal bird with a yellow bill — are believed to have died from the disease on three remote islands, the state's leader said last week.

On Monday, the environment minister, Murray Watt, told the national broadcaster: "We are likely to see mass mortalities of birds and mammals. And I know that is a very distressing thing for Australians to hear, but we also need to be realistic."

So far, the disease has not been detected in poultry or on farms, according to the government, and the risk to humans remains low.

Euan Ritchie, a professor of wildlife ecology at Deakin University in the state of Victoria, said that while the disease had not been in Australia long, the speed of its spread was concerning.

"We have a feeling of dread that we're only about to see the beginning of it now and it's about to get far worse," he said.

JOEL CARRETT/AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATED PRESS, VIA REUTERS

A penguin getting a bird flu vaccine on Phillip Island, Australia, on Sunday. "It's about to get far worse," one expert said.

He added that Australia's wildlife had evolved in isolation for millions of years, creating animals found nowhere else, such as the Australian sea lion, which is considered vulnerable, with fewer than 10,000 adults in the wild.

But this isolation also meant that the animals were more at risk of contracting new pathogens because they had not developed any immunity. This particular strain of bird flu has decimated animal populations worldwide since 2020. While Australia has had other strains of bird flu before, it successfully eradicated them. The arrival of H5N1 this year is the first time Australia has been affected by the disease, putting the country's response to the test.

How is the government responding?

The Australian government began vaccinating at-risk bird species this month. Among those receiving the vaccination will be 5,000 little penguins in Victoria. They are easy to vaccinate because they waddle from the ocean to their burrows each evening.

Millions of dollars' worth of funding has been allocated to combat the disease, paying for increased surveillance to ensure early detection and response.

But some conservationists and experts have criticized the government for being too slow to roll out vaccines and have called for increased investment in habitat protections.

Ariful Islam, a bird flu and epidemiology expert from Charles Sturt University in the state of New South Wales, said vaccinations were not a "silver bullet," particularly when it came to wild birds, which needed monitoring to ensure that the vaccine produced the necessary antibodies for protection from the disease.

The public is also joining the fight. Volunteers are helping document bird deaths, particularly in South Australia. Among them is Maureen Christie, secretary of Friends of Shorebirds SE, who spends each morning searching for sick or dead birds along a patch of coastline in the town of Carpenter Rocks, and reporting them.

But the work has taken its toll.

"You can't do anything to really help the birds," she said.

Can the virus spread to other animals?

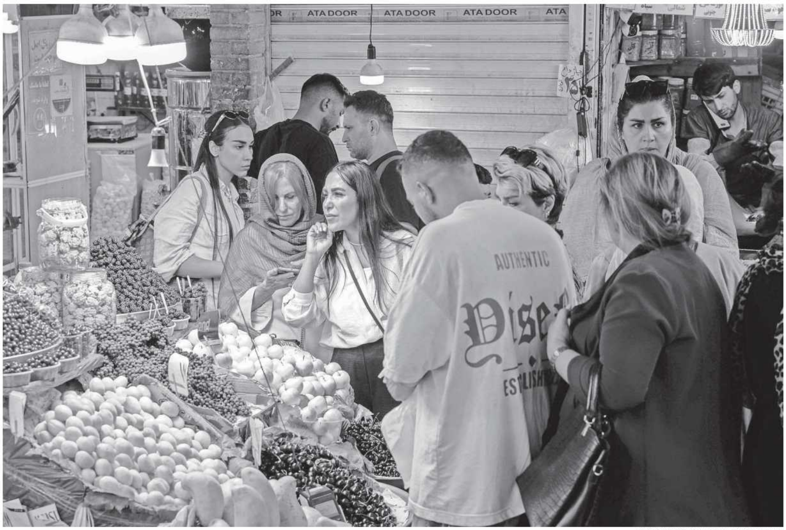
Yes. H5N1 has infected a range of mammals, including cows, cats, foxes and raccoons around the world. But marine mammals have been hit particularly hard. The disease killed at least 24,000 South American sea lions along the continent's coasts in less than a year in 2023.

In Australia, the authorities confirmed the first case of H5N1 in a long-nosed fur seal in South Australia last week. A second seal was suspected to have died from the disease on Monday.

Jane Younger, a seal expert from the University of Tasmania, said the disease could become an "extinction event" if it were to spread among marine mammals such as the Australian sea lion. Most of the sea lions share the same habitat in South Australia as the infected birds.

A vaccine has not yet been approved for use in Australian mammals.

"Unfortunately, there's not really anything that can be done to stop the virus from spreading," Ms. Younger said, adding, "it's spread by wild animals, and we just don't have any control over that."



ARASH KHAMOOSHI/POLARIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Shopping for groceries in Tehran. This year, inflation and unemployment have skyrocketed, and prices of everyday products are increasingly out of reach for many Iranians.

Iran may have little left to lose

As U.S. plans to squeeze its economy, the regime has promised to retaliate

BY ERIKA SOLOMON
AND SANAM MAHOOZI

Facing a fresh economic assault from the United States, Iran's leaders are gambling that they can weather the coming storm and make the cost of their suffering felt in an oil-rich region that is critical to the global economy.

With Iran's devastating economic crisis deepening, experts warn, Iranian leaders may feel they have little to lose by responding to U.S. pressure with the kind of military escalation President Trump now seems keen to avoid.

"The harder Washington pushes third countries to sever Iran's remaining lifelines, the stronger Tehran's incentive becomes to demonstrate that participating in Iran's isolation carries costs of its own," said Sina Toossi, an Iran expert at the Center for International Policy, a Washington-based think tank.

For months, as military confrontation has slowed, Iran's struggle with Washington has amounted to a game of chicken over who can withstand the economic pain longer.

Iran's oil revenues have been squeezed by a U.S. naval blockade, while the Trump administration has contended with rising energy prices in the United States as Iran and its allies disrupt transit through the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea — vital waterways for oil and gas shipping.

The question of who will blink first looms large. This week, U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent announced a new package of measures that he said would further strangle Iran's economy.

The success of the latest U.S. effort will depend largely on whether the administration can compel Iran's main trade partners — including Turkey, Iraq, Russia and China — to participate.

Iran's top security chief, Mohsen Rezaei, has vowed that "not a single drop" of oil would leave the region if countries in the Persian Gulf were to join the U.S. effort, adding that they would be considered enemy states.

In earlier stages of the conflict, Iran has shown no qualms about dragging its Gulf neighbors into the fray, launching volleys of missiles and drones at them.

Yet the severity of the Iranian warnings underscores just how bad Iran's current economic crisis is — and how it is worsening by the day.

The Iranian oil minister recently acknowledged that the oil exports that underpin the economy are close to zero because of the U.S. blockade. And a report on Monday by the country's most prominent economic newspaper said that the rial had depreciated by 41 percent since December last year, when the already spiraling currency exchange rate spurred protests that morphed into weeks of nationwide unrest.

> **"When it comes to Iran, the U.S. has exhausted its ability to have a shock and awe and to really hurt the Iranian regime."**

At the time, that posed one of the most serious challenges in decades to Iran's authoritarian clerical rulers, and the security forces responded weeks later with a deadly crackdown.

Since then, inflation and unemployment have skyrocketed, with prices of everyday goods increasingly out of reach for many Iranians. The prices of some medicines have risen by as much as 500 percent, according to local media reports. The country also faces an ever-worsening gasoline supply crisis, caused in part by damage to Iran's energy infrastructure from U.S.-Israeli strikes and by the disruption of fuel imports due to the U.S. naval blockade. A previous fuel crisis, in 2019, led to large-scale protests in Iran.

On Tuesday, the BBC's Persian-language service broadcast videos of frustrated Iranians arriving at gas station after gas station, only to discover that there was no fuel, while other videos showed long queues of cars waiting to be filled up.

Still, Iranian officials are projecting confidence that their leadership can survive. For decades, American leaders have vowed to devastate the Iranian economy through ever-harsher sanctions, which the Islamic republic's leaders have learned to withstand.

The government "has been planning to confront U.S. sanctions for a long time and is fully prepared for new sanctions," Ali Madanizadeh, the economy minister, said on Monday. Iran had a secret two-year plan in place for dealing with such sanctions, he said, without elaborating.

Iran's ability to withstand the latest U.S. economic pressure campaign will depend on the attitude of its key trading partners. China, the world's biggest buyer of Iranian oil, is unlikely to bend to Mr. Trump's will, experts say. Beijing has long rejected U.S. sanctions that target other countries' businesses, regarding them as an effort to control and coerce other governments through the global power of the dollar.

Much will also depend on Iran's neighbors Turkey, a key trading partner and a logistical hub, and Iraq, a huge market for Iranian exports.

Most major financial institutions already comply with existing U.S. sanctions against Iran, but stamping out cross-border relationships and shadow business networks, some of which are centuries old, will be much harder, according to Ellie Geranmayeh, an Iran expert with the European Council on Foreign Relations.

"When it comes to Iran, the U.S. has exhausted its ability to have a shock and awe and to really hurt the Iranian regime," she said.

Iran's leadership believes that the world economy has yet to feel the full extent of the shock caused by the closing of the Strait of Hormuz. That could strengthen Iran's hand in any future negotiations with the Trump administration ahead of the U.S. midterm elections in November.

Others in Iran's leadership are convinced that, once those elections are over, the Trump administration will push for a new, more expansive round of war, Ms. Geranmayeh said. "Either way, from Tehran's perspective, there's very little incentive in caving in on U.S. demands at this point," she added.

In the meantime, experts say, ordinary Iranians will bear the brunt of the war's economic pain, while those close to the leadership may extract wealth from a shadow economy built to circumvent sanctions.

"The sanctions will make Iran's economy even less transparent," said Peyman Molavi, an economist based in Tehran. "This environment tends to benefit well-connected stakeholders."

Mr. Bessent identified several sectors as targets of the new U.S. campaign, including gold, digital assets, technology, aviation and shipping. Flights remain a lifeline for ordinary Iranians to visit family outside the country, while investing in digital assets and gold have been a way to protect their savings from the currency crisis and surging inflation.

"The Iranian people are the collateral damage" of U.S. sanctions, according to Esfandyar Batmanghelidj, who heads the Bourse & Bazaar Foundation, a London-based think tank focused on Iran's economy.

Iranians may see the U.S. campaign as intended to make them suffer so much that they rise up against the government, said Mohammad Ali Shabani, an Iran analyst and editor of the regional news website, Amwaj.media.

That would be seen by Iranians as a particularly cynical calculation, after the January crackdown in which thousands of Iranian protesters were killed.

"This is pretty brutal," Mr. Shabani said of the U.S. approach. "They know what happened in January. The Iranian government is not going to give up and go home."

Leily Nikounazar contributed reporting

Decades of sanctions without much effect

WASHINGTON

Trade has been curtailed and assets frozen, but Iran's behavior hasn't changed

BY MICHAEL CROWLEY

Soon after taking office last year, President Trump issued a directive laying out his "maximum economic pressure" policy against Iran.

Yet Mr. Trump seems to have decided that even maximum pressure can be turned up to 11.

He calls his new plan "Economic D-Day," and it is meant to break the stalemate in the U.S. conflict with Iran.

This week, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent announced new sanctions against 60 Iranian and Iran-linked entities, individuals and vessels, and demanded the closing of all branches of a major Iranian bank that operates in many countries.

But his demands that other nations stop doing business with Iran underscore the difficulty in trying to impose sanctions on Iran's economy to the point of collapse.

Thoroughly enforcing sanctions is notoriously hard, and in Iran's case would require messy run-ins with allies and powerful rivals capable of retaliation, most notably China. Imposing a full ban on global trade with Iran, as Mr. Bessent called for, multiplies those challenges.

Since Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, the United States has placed sanctions on thousands of specific Iranian officials, businesses, vessels and other entities — freezing any of their assets under U.S. jurisdiction and barring them from transactions with American banks, businesses or people.

The U.S. government has also broadly targeted most of Iran's major industries, from oil to banking to textiles and manufacturing; one round of sanctions in 2020 hit two Tehran-based tile and ceramics companies. In his first term, Mr. Trump even formally designated Iran's central bank and national oil company as financial backers of terrorism.

"We've done all the low-hanging, medium-hanging and high-hanging fruit," said Alan Eyre, a former U.S. diplomat and an Iran expert now with the Middle East Institute, a Washington-based think tank. "We've cut down the whole sanctions tree. There's nothing left."

All that provides reason for skepticism about Mr. Trump's latest plan for coercing Iran through economic pain.

Nearly 50 years of American sanctions, dating back to the Carter administration, have done little to change Iran's behavior. After anti-American revolutionaries overthrew a friendly Iranian government in 1979 and took dozens of American diplomats hostage in Tehran, President Jimmy Carter banned many Iranian imports and froze Iranian assets worth $12 billion.

His successor, President Ronald Reagan, declared Tehran a state sponsor of terrorism, a move that prompted an arms sale ban and tightly limited the export of "dual use" items that might have a military function. (Reagan violated his own ban in a covert arms-for-hostages scheme that became the infamous Iran-contra affair.) In 1987, all Iranian goods and services were prohibited from import into the United States.

By the mid-1990s, concern about Iran's suspected interest in chemical, biological and nuclear weapons led to increased American pressure on its economy. Congress passed a measure threatening sanctions against foreign companies that invested heavily in Iran's petroleum industry, and President Bill Clinton ordered a near-total ban on all American trade and investment.

Iran's advancing nuclear program was a source of major alarm in Washington and Western Europe by the 2000s. In several actions from 2006 to 2010, the United Nations Security Council froze the assets of dozens of Iranian officials and entities connected to its nuclear program, barred arms exports to and from Iran, and prohibited Iran from testing ballistic missiles.

Congress took even more severe action in the following years, barring foreign transactions with Iran's central bank and threatening to penalize other nations unless they reduced their imports of Iranian oil.

The pressure took a toll: Between 2012 and 2015, Iran's oil exports plunged to one million barrels per day from 2.5 million, according to a U.S. Congressional Research Service report, and Iran was left without access to assets worth more than $120 billion held abroad.

Faced with that economic pain — and growing talk of U.S. or Israeli military action — Iran agreed in 2013 to begin negotiations over its nuclear program with the Obama administration and several other world powers.

TIERNEY L. CROSS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent announced new sanctions against 60 Iranian and Iran-linked entities, individuals and vessels. He also demanded that other nations stop doing business with Iran.

The result was the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, which traded limits on Iran's nuclear activity for the removal of many of the nuclear-related U.S. and U.N. sanctions imposed on the country over the previous two decades.

The reprieve was short lived. Mr. Trump withdrew from the nuclear deal in 2018 and immediately restored the nuclear-related sanctions lifted under the Obama-era agreement.

Mr. Trump has bombarded the country with new sanctions. He targeted virtually the entire Iranian economy, expanding penalties to sectors like construction, mining, textiles and manufacturing. Even third-country businesses or individuals that transacted with dozens of major Iranian companies could be subject to American sanctions.

Most significantly, in 2019 Mr. Trump sought to cut off Iran's oil revenue entirely, announcing that any country that imported Iranian crude would be subject to severe U.S. penalties, potentially including loss of access to the U.S. financial system. "Maximum pressure means maximum pressure," an April 2019 State Department fact sheet declared.

But Iran has grown skilled at evading U.S. sanctions, including through the use of a so-called shadow fleet of tankers that ship its crude to foreign buyers.

Mr. Trump has never picked the sort of fights with nations like China and India that analysts say would be necessary to enforce such a policy. On Monday, Mr. Bessent said that no country would be exempt from the new approach. But analysts like Mr. Eyre were skeptical. The new policy is unlikely to succeed, he said, "unless President Trump wants to make full Chinese compliance, for instance, the centerpiece of U.S. relations" with Beijing.

"I don't think that's going to happen," he said.

Cracking down on cafe culture to control public spaces

BY LEILY NIKOUNAZAR
AND YEGANEH TORBATI

Through war, political unrest and rampant inflation that has put the dreams of many beyond reach, Iran's youth have held on to one luxury that helps them feel normal in abnormal times: frequenting coffee shops with friends.

Across Iran, they pack into cafes and spill out onto the sidewalk — chatting, smoking cigarettes, flirting and enjoying one of the few affordable diversions still available to them. These mixed-gender gatherings, where women go unveiled and some customers even discreetly drink alcohol, both illegal acts in Iran, have become a conspicuous counterculture, visible to any passerby.

It has not escaped the attention of the authorities, either. In recent weeks, the police have been shutting down dozens of cafes, usually citing a failure to abide by Iran's mandatory hijab law.

The crackdown has stretched to cities across the country, taking in restaurants and boutiques as well, according to statements from officials, though some businesses have since reopened.

It is a social scene, experts say, that challenges the government's efforts to dominate Iran's public spaces. Since nationwide protests in January that began over the spiraling economy and were crushed by lethal force, the government has sought to tightly control any public gatherings.

And as the United States' war with Iran, aimed in part at unseating the Islamic republic, drags on without resolution, the regime has held pro-government nighttime rallies that serve both to bolster a narrative of popular public support and to dissuade dissidents from protesting.

Cafe owners, employees and their customers in Tehran said in interviews that the authorities appeared to be targeting cafes that were clustered next to one another. The small footprint of these businesses often means that customers linger on the sidewalks, forming spontaneous gatherings that the authorities regard with wariness.

"It seems that a campaign has begun to control postwar Iran, a society that is unhappy and under strain," said Amir, 45, a cafe owner in Tehran who said his business had not been closed recently but had been previously. "We always console ourselves with the thought that this is just a wave. They come and shut us down, but we rise again."

Amir, like other Iranians interviewed for this article, asked to be identified by his first name only, for fear of retribution from Iran's government.

"The cafes are being shut down because of the crowds that gather outside them in the afternoons," said Mona, a 36-year-old artist in Tehran. The authorities, she said, "seem to think it's some kind of protest gathering or something, when really it's just a bunch of young women and men who look a little different from what the officials are used to, hanging out together."

ARASH KHAMOOSHI/POLARIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Iranians at a cafe in Tehran in April. The casual mixed-gender social scene, where women go unveiled, challenges the government's efforts to project its authority.

Iran's foreign ministry did not respond to a request for comment. The authorities have given various justifications for shutting down the businesses, from routine regulatory violations to breaches of the mandatory hijab rules. "Social and moral misconduct," "failing to observe Islamic values" and "norm-breaking" have also been cited.

Indeed, the coffee shops, with their impromptu gatherings and customers who flout the hijab law, do break the rules and norms that the government expects Iranians to abide by. Three Tehran residents, including one cafe owner, said that many of the cafes in central Tehran were known for serving beer. Alcohol consumption in Iran is punishable by lashing.

Haleh Mir Miri, an author and a researcher in Canada who has written a book on Iran's coffee shop culture, said the scene served both as a respite from family and social restrictions and as a rejection of the government's ideology.

"Through cafe culture, people could imagine and invent other ways of living and becoming," she said. "For a totalitarian government accustomed to homogenizing people's lives, that is inherently dangerous."

Even if the closures are an effort to disrupt this cafe culture, the government has struggled to curb drastic changes in Iranian society over the last four years.

In the summer of 2022, the then-government of President Ebrahim Raisi harshly cracked down on women who were not abiding by the compulsory hijab rule. The authorities carried out violent arrests, and a 22-year-old woman, Mahsa Amini, died in custody after being detained by Iran's morality police.

That led to mass protests known as the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement, which rocked Iran for months and signified a turning point for many women in the country. Since then, it has become increasingly normal to see women showing their hair in public and even wearing tight, revealing outfits.

So far, the current government led by President Masoud Pezeshkian appears to have largely refrained from arresting individual women for not wearing hijabs, and officials have said that fully enforcing the law could set off another explosion of unrest.

Cafe owners and workers said that the closures, though perhaps futile amid changing social norms, can still be deeply damaging. Young people with few other job prospects lose income, sales halt while rent and other expenses continue and a network of coffee roasters and other suppliers suffer.

"Young people used to feel that, at the very least, if they couldn't find a job anywhere else, they could always go work at a cafe," said Reza, a barista in Tehran. "Now, even that option is disappearing."

Mona, the artist in Tehran, said news of each cafe closure left her with a feeling of "hopelessness," a sense that despite deep societal changes, the authorities would never cease their quest for control.

"You think, 'Oh, so this is never going to get better. It's never going to become normal,'" she said.

Defiance replacing deference toward Trump

TRUMP, FROM PAGE 1

But even among Republicans, there are worrisome signs for the president. Although he has successfully punished several prominent Republican lawmakers he deemed disloyal by rallying his base to defeat them in party primaries this year, Republican voters have rejected Mr. Trump's endorsed candidates in 10 nominating contests, including six in August alone. Polls show his support among Republicans slipping.

"I think that recent weeks have been somewhat of an inflection point," said Norm Eisen, a former Obama White House lawyer and founder of a group called the Democracy Defenders Fund, who has been waging multiple court fights against Mr. Trump. "At home and abroad, pro-democracy forces and everybody else are standing up to him with much more widespread vigor."

Among others, Mr. Eisen has been involved in legal battles over the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, birthright citizenship, the Federal Reserve and the aborted prosecution of a former Olympian charged with vandalizing the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool. To the extent that there has been a shift, Mr. Eisen said, it owes in part to overreaching by Mr. Trump. "Trump has been his own worst enemy," he said.

Mr. Trump and his advisers reject that assessment, of course, and point to his continuing ability to shape events. In a series of social media posts in recent days, the president has taken credit for falling crime rates and insisted that he is winning the war with Iran. He has disputed polls showing his unpopularity and rejected stories about recent primary losses.

"The actual Polls are tremendous, and the Spirit in our Country has never been higher," he wrote. "We're winning against EVERYONE, including Iran, whose Country is in Economic and Military Death Spiral."

He said that his "endorsements are stronger than ever" and asserted that the Republican candidates who were defeated despite his support were never going to prevail. "The few that lost were done out of loyalty," he wrote. "It was almost impossible for them to win but, I felt obligated to go with them because they were, in my opinion, good people!"

Mr. Trump did not have to explain away losses when he first returned to the White House last year. In his early months, it seemed that he was winning across the board. Even without a strong mandate — he won a second term with just 49.9 percent of the popular vote — he managed to impose his will across society.

ONALD TRUMP
MORIAL C NTER F

PETE KIEHART FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

PATRICK DOYLE/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Above, covering President Trump's name at the Kennedy Center in Washington in June. "Trump has been his own worst enemy," a lawyer involved in a legal battle over the center said. Left, Prime Minister Mark Carney of Canada, who has defied Mr. Trump.

He dictated to private businesses how they should make decisions and universities how they should teach. He made diversity programs so radioactive that employers around the country dropped them. He gutted federal agencies without asking Congress, took over the Kennedy Center and used the power of government to go after his enemies. And in the process, he succeeded in pressuring others to follow his desires. Law firms, universities, media firms and tech billionaires bent over backward to show deference as they changed policies to suit him or agreed to multimillion-dollar deals that he demanded.

Jacob Weisberg, who chronicled the trend of submission in a book coming out next month called "Profiles in Cowardice," said that the incentives have begun to reverse and that giving in to Mr. Trump can now generate a costly backlash. "The price has risen on the other side for capitulation," he said, citing as an example the criticism when Yale University in Connecticut began negotiating with the Trump administration.

Still, he cautioned against overstating how much has changed yet. "There's some signs, but there have been signs before and people have gotten ahead of themselves," Mr. Weisberg said. "I believe it will start to turn around at some point, and I think it's tied to Trump's popularity. I've always thought that when he gets down below 30s, you'll start to see different behavior. And there are some indications that's happening."

There are indications that is happening overseas as well, at least in Europe and, to a lesser extent, the Middle East. When Mr. Trump became president again last year, NATO allies bowed to his pressure and agreed to increase military spending. But now they are more resistant to his demands across the board, from Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez of Spain on the left to Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni of Italy on the right.

"It's good politics for a lot of these European leaders to stand up to him," said Matthew Kroenig, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security and a former national security official under three presidents, including Mr. Trump. "We see that most clearly in Spain, but also in other places in Europe."

That seemed to change early in the year when Mr. Trump pushed to take over Greenland, which is part of Denmark, a NATO ally. Mr. Trump even held out the possibility of using military power to seize the expansive island, raising the prospect of NATO at war with itself. Rather than trying to placate him, as they had in the past, European leaders spoke out forcefully against Mr. Trump and some even sent a small number of troops to Greenland for military exercises to make the point.

"Greenland was a turning point, in part because it was an attack on the sovereignty of Europe itself and Europeans began to understand at that point there was simply no end to Trump's rapaciousness and to his demands," said Jeremy Shapiro, a former State Department official now at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

Mr. Kroenig said he has heard the same from European leaders. "That's one they come back to over and over again," he said. "It's one thing to say we need to spend more on defense, it's one thing to have a trade war. But a NATO ally threatening military force against another NATO ally, that's crossing a line."

For all that, he noted, European leaders are not looking for a fight with Mr. Trump either, and they have stuck with their commitment to increase military spending. "It does seem like they're going all in," Mr. Kroenig said. And he noted that Chancellor Friedrich Merz of Germany, while criticizing the Iran war, is allowing American forces to use bases in the country.

"Pro-democracy forces and everybody else are standing up to him with much more widespread vigor."

The clash with Canada brings a lot of that history to the fore. Both sides have continued to escalate in recent days. Announcing that he had broken off talks last week, Mr. Carney said he had long warned that "America is trying to break us so they can own us, and I promised that that will never ever happen."

Mr. Trump on Tuesday denounced Mr. Carney as a "weak and ineffective prime minister" and threatened to change the name of Lake Ontario to Lake America since "we don't expect to be doing much business with Ontario any longer."

Kush Desai, a White House spokesman, said that Mr. Trump had offered Canada an attractive deal. "With so much of Canada's economy reliant on exporting to the United States — which has an over 12-times larger economy and seven-times larger population — Canada's position is less about defiance and more about short-term foolishness," he said in an email.

Leaders across the world are watching. Mr. Shapiro said they "mostly now believe that backing down in the face of Trumpian aggression or insults only encourages more demands." He added: "I think Carney is setting the template for how they will respond to future Trumpian tariff threats."

Purge of top generals leaves the U.S. Army rudderless

WASHINGTON

Defense secretary's firings come as service adapts to war dominated by drones

BY GREG JAFFE, ERIC SCHMITT,
HELENE COOPER AND ADAM ENTOUS

A series of firings and feuds initiated by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has left the U.S. Army essentially rudderless as it struggles to deal with the threat posed by cheap, deadly drones and missiles that have pounded its bases in the Middle East.

The Army has not had a chief of staff, the service's top officer, since Mr. Hegseth fired Gen. Randy George without explanation in April, and there are no signs that he is close to filling the position, said current and former officials speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive personnel matters.

Mr. Hegseth has forced out at least three senior officers who had been viewed as potential successors to General George.

Army Secretary Daniel P. Driscoll, the service's top civilian leader, is also expected to leave the administration in the next few months and has already moved out of the large family house that he had been renting in Fort Myer, outside Washington, officials said.

The turmoil comes as the Army, the military's largest service, faces its busiest period since the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Army air-defense soldiers are playing the leading role in defending U.S. troops in the Middle East from increasingly sophisticated Iranian missile attacks. The Army's command in Europe is providing critical intelligence and other support to Ukraine as it fights to hold off a larger Russian force.

Until recently, Mr. Driscoll was widely seen as a potential candidate to replace Mr. Hegseth if he decided to step down or fell out of favor with President Trump.

Mr. Driscoll and General George had worked together to prepare the Army for a battlefield teeming with drones. Late last year, the White House asked Mr. Driscoll to play a lead role in its push to secure a peace deal that would end the war in Ukraine.

Those peace efforts have largely stalled, the rapid modernization push is being scaled back and Mr. Driscoll is barely on speaking terms with Mr. Hegseth, officials said. His impending departure was reported earlier by The Wall Street Journal.

Beyond General George, Mr. Hegseth has fired or forced out a half-dozen senior officers — a generation of the Army's most combat-hardened leaders — thinning the service's top ranks for the next several years, officials said.

"Hollowing out the most battle-tested and most lethal, proven leaders in a time of war means troops are less safe and we're less likely to win," said Representative Pat Ryan, Democrat of New York and a former Army intelligence officer.

A long-term worry is that the firings send a message that officers who provide frank military advice or fail ideological litmus tests have no place in a force that is supposed to be nonpartisan, military and congressional officials said. "We're doing generational damage to the sense that the military is an apolitical trusted organization that swears an oath to the Constitution, not to a president," Mr. Ryan added.

"Troops are less safe and we're less likely to win."

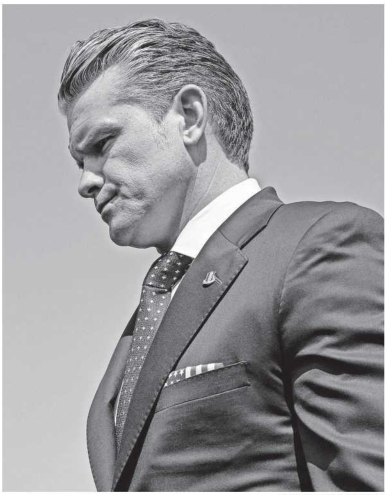
Mr. Hegseth's office referred questions about the firings and lack of senior leadership to the Army. The Army declined to comment on Mr. Driscoll's status, saying it does not speculate on "leadership changes."

In a statement, the service played down the impact of the firings.

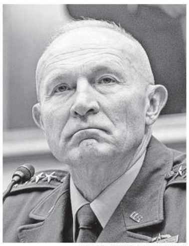
"Army leaders exemplify the highest standards of duty, selflessness, and professional excellence," said Cynthia O. Smith, an Army spokeswoman. "They are actively driving the Army's mission forward, ensuring that our strategic objectives are met, our modernization efforts remain on track and our global readiness is never compromised."

One measure of the vacuum at the top of the Army is the number of four-star generals serving in its ranks. As recently as January last year, when Mr. Hegseth took office, there were 10 four-star generals on active duty. The service currently has five, the fewest in decades.

Some of those positions are commands focused on regions of the world, like the Middle East or Asia, and are being filled by senior officers from other services. Some have been eliminated.



KENNY HOLSTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES



HAIYUN JIANG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

HAIYUN JIANG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, above left, fired the U.S. Army's chief of staff, Gen. Randy George, top right, in April. Daniel P. Driscoll, above right, the secretary of the Army, is barely on speaking terms with Mr. Hegseth, officials said, and is expected to step down.

Others, like the job overseeing the Army's Transformation and Training Command, have been empty for months. Last summer, Mr. Hegseth selected Gen. David M. Hodne to lead the command and then fired him eight months later without explanation.

The command is responsible for training and equipping the Army's ground units, including its Patriot antimissile crews. The Patriots are the main defense against Iranian ballistic missiles fired at U.S. bases in the Middle East.

As the war has progressed, Iran has become a more skilled adversary, learning to evade U.S. systems with advanced missiles that can suddenly change course. One Iranian missile struck prefabricated housing units at one of the American bases in Jordan on July 17, killing three U.S. soldiers and wounding more than 100.

The Army has responded by burning through its scarce supplies of Patriot interceptors, defense officials said.

Another critical vacancy came last month when Mr. Hegseth reduced Gen. Christopher T. Donahue's command overseeing U.S. ground troops in Europe to a three-star position, forcing the senior Army officer, if he did not get another four-star position, to retire.

On the opening day of the war, Iran launched volleys of Shahed drones, similar to those used by the Russians. One attack struck a U.S. Army base in Kuwait, killing six soldiers. General Donahue's command had trained and equipped teams of drone defenders, who were quickly dispatched to the Middle East.

The most glaring Army vacancy, though, has been the absence at the very top following General George's dismissal four months ago. As Army chief, General George was responsible for training and equipping Army units around the world. His responsibilities included accelerating the purchase of critical munitions such as Patriot interceptors, ATACMS artillery systems and other ground-based weaponry.

General George struggled to forge a relationship with Mr. Hegseth, who arrived at the Pentagon with deep suspicions of the Army's senior leadership rooted in his own experience, Army officials said. After deploying to Iraq and Afghanistan, Mr. Hegseth was forced to leave the National Guard for tattoos that were deemed extremist.

"The military I loved, I fought for, I revered," he wrote in a 2024 book, "spit me out."

Mr. Hegseth's mistrust of General George and other senior Army leaders seemed to grow with each passing month in the Pentagon.

Last October, Mr. Hegseth pushed out Gen. James Mingus, the Army's vice chief of staff, a year before he was scheduled to leave his post.

In his place, Mr. Hegseth and the White House nominated Gen. Christopher LaNeve, Mr. Hegseth's senior military aide, to fill the job as the Army's second in command, overseeing the service's daily operations.

His decision to sideline General Mingus without offering a clear reason caused some in the Senate to balk and contributed to a further erosion in Mr. Hegseth's strained relationship with the Army and Congress.

Currently, General LaNeve, Mr. Hegseth's choice to lead the Army, does not have enough Republican support in the Senate to be confirmed. Generals and admirals nominated to lead the military services typically receive unanimous or near-unanimous support in the Senate.

Among those blocking General LaNeve's rise is Senator Joni Ernst, a Republican from Iowa who served 22 years in the Iowa National Guard.

She believed that, in exchange for her supporting General LaNeve as the Army's vice chief of staff last fall, Mr. Hegseth had assured her that he would let General George, a fellow Iowan, finish his term as chief, which was slated to end in mid-2027. Ms. Ernst's objections to General LaNeve were reported earlier by The Wall Street Journal.

After General George was fired, she called Mr. Trump to complain, telling him that General George was one of the Army's best officers, according to a congressional official familiar with the call.

Mr. Trump explained that the firing was Mr. Hegseth's decision. "Tell the general I'm sorry," Mr. Trump said.

WORLD

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CLAYTON STEWARD FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A City Council meeting in Independence, Mo., in June. A group of data center opponents collected enough signatures to force the special recall election of Councilman John Perkins.

Data centers roil U.S. voters

INDEPENDENCE, MO.

More local officials face recall elections for their support of computing sites

BY DAVID MCCABE

At a City Council meeting in Independence, Mo., in June, a councilman, John Perkins, stared down a crowd intent on throwing him out of office.

The room was packed with dozens of people, some forced to stand in the back. Many had helped gather more than 1,200 signatures to recall Mr. Perkins over an issue that had roiled the city for months: a data center under construction on the outskirts of town.

They were spitting mad that Mr. Perkins, along with four other Council members, had voted in March to award billions of dollars in tax breaks to the $150 billion data center project. Some became emotional as they accused the Council of making a bad deal for a project they did not want.

"The people haven't been listened to," said Joanie Flanagan, 62, a retired real estate agent and massage therapist.

Data centers, the giant computing sites powering the artificial intelligence boom, have caused a national backlash that is set to affect voters' decisions in November's midterm elections. But some residents in more than a dozen cities and towns across the United States are so angry about local elected officials' approving the energy-guzzling warehouses, they are not waiting.

In Festus, Mo., critics of a local data center project gathered enough signatures in May to force a vote to remove the mayor and City Council members who had approved a $6 billion data center, though the effort is tied up in legal wrangling. In Mason, Mich., residents will vote in November over whether to recall a City Council member over a vote to create zoning rules for data centers.

Voters in Yukon, Okla., will also decide in November whether to recall their mayor after the town moved to sell land to a data center developer. And residents of Independence, a city of 121,000 that is 10 miles (16 kilometers) from Kansas City, will vote on whether to remove Mr. Perkins on Tuesday.

Some local officials have already lost their jobs in the face of data center concerns in regularly scheduled elections. Last year, two members of the Georgia Public Service Commission lost their seats amid concern about data centers' driving up electricity prices. A Virginia state delegate, Geary Higgins, also lost his job last year after his opponent branded him "Data Center Geary."

"People are standing up and saying, 'Sorry, we don't want these data centers in our communities for a number of reasons,'" Senator Bernie Sanders, the Vermont independent, said in an interview. "'If you can't have the guts to stand up to some large corporation, you should not continue serving in office.'"

Voters have little patience for politicians supporting data centers, said Amy Kremer, the chairwoman of Humans First, a conservative-leaning group promoting greater A.I. regulation. They will "step up and recall them and hold them accountable."

Independence would be one of the first municipalities to hold a data-center-motivated recall election. A judge this month rejected a legal challenge by Mr. Perkins and others, who argued the recall violated Missouri's Constitution.

Mr. Perkins, 54, said in an interview that the argument for the recall had "no merit" and that a "single vote" should not outweigh years of work for his constituents.

Top, residents of Independence, Mo., holding signs at the City Council meeting; above, the nearby power plant that will help generate electricity for a $150 billion data center project. Mr. Perkins had voted to award billions in tax breaks to the project.

John Sutter, the vice president of U.S. public affairs at Nebius, the Dutch firm building the data center, said the company did not "get involved in political races."

"Our job here is to show the public, and show the community, that the vote that Council member Perkins made along with his other fellow Council members, this was a vote for the future of Independence," Mr. Sutter said.

"People are standing up and saying, 'Sorry, we don't want these data centers in our communities.'"

Independence is an expansive, low-slung satellite community with a red brick Colonial Revival courthouse towering over a town square, and with sites marking the start of the Oregon Trail and home of Harry Truman. It is ringed by residential neighborhoods mixed with shopping centers anchored by Walmart, Costco and Bass Pro Shop.

The city has faced economic challenges in recent years. Almost 16 percent of its residents live in poverty, more than the statewide average. Major employers include Olin Winchester, which operates the Lake City Army Ammunition Plant on the edge of the city, and health care facilities.

Starting in 2008, the city built a road called the Little Blue Parkway to help develop unused land near the ammunition plant. It sat empty for years. In 2022, Independence rezoned the area for industrial use.

When Nebius bought a site there in December with plans to build a 2.25-million-square-foot (210,000-square-meter) data center complex, some thought the project was a boon. The site had access to power from Independence Power & Light, the city's utility, augmented by a plan to bring a retired power plant back online. Nebius said the complex would employ at least 150 people full time and create more than 1,000 construction jobs.

Shortly after the purchase, Nebius applied for tax breaks under a statewide economic development program. The company also reached out to residents, including an open house in January at a local library building.

McKenna Cobb, 31, who works in medical billing, took her two children to the event. She worried the project could worsen water quality and raise electricity prices. She spoke with Mr. Perkins there and said she came away unsatisfied with his support of the project.

"I left with a lot to worry about," Ms. Cobb said.

Nebius continued to lobby for the tax breaks. It was "unlikely the project would proceed at the same level of investment, if at all," a lawyer for the company warned in a city meeting in February.

City Council members were "very convinced that this was the best thing for Independence," Jared Fears, a member at the time, said of the project.

Once the center was built, it would contribute $35 million to $55 million a year in revenues to the city's general fund, which totaled roughly $85 million last year, he said. The city also estimates that the project would contribute tens of millions of dollars to the local utility, schools and public institutions like libraries.

At a regular meeting in March, the Council voted five to two to give Nebius a 90 percent break on personal property taxes and a 98 percent break on real property taxes. The property tax incentives totaled $6.26 billion over 20 years. (Under state law, Independence can determine the total level of tax breaks to give an economic development project.)

Mr. Perkins told attendees — many of whom had shown up to protest the vote — that Nebius would use limited water and that the city had ensured residents were protected from rising electricity prices. If the company didn't hold up its end of the bargain, Independence could yank the incentives, he said.

"The protections are there," he added. "I feel very comfortable with this."

But many residents remained incensed. Their frustrations soon boiled over.

In April, two Council members who had voted for the tax breaks were on the ballot.

Mr. Fears knocked on doors a day before his re-election bid for one of the Council's two at-large seats. One voter said she did not believe the project would financially benefit the city and thought it would raise electricity costs. "There was nothing I could do to change her mind," he recalled.

Mr. Fears lost to candidates who criticized or called for more accountability around the project. Bridget McCandless, another Council member who voted for the tax deal, lost her bid to be mayor.

Ms. Cobb and others wanted to fire Mr. Perkins, who was years away from being up for re-election. She teamed up with other residents to collect signatures for a recall vote, motivated by what they said was Mr. Perkins's lack of engagement with data center skeptics.

In June, the county's election board verified that the organizers had obtained enough signatures.

The Council was notified at the June meeting. Recall supporters, including children, held signs with messages like "Represent Us or Resign." Others held signs that said, "We support John Perkins."

Kevin King, the mayor, warned that the microphone would be cut for anyone who made "personal, impertinent or slanderous remarks." He said comments should be directed to the Council as a whole instead of individual members.

Lynne Baker, 81, a former high school counselor, said Independence was struggling to retain residents when nearby cities had more money to spend on their communities. "I'm just going to say it once, but I'm here to support Councilman Perkins," she said, as the crowd shouted objections.

"Ma'am, you cannot," Mr. King replied sharply.

Mr. Perkins stayed quiet. Near the end of the meeting, he thanked the crowd for its thoughts.

Mr. Perkins has spent recent days knocking on doors and putting up signs to keep his job.

"I'm in the campaign mode now, to get my message out," he said. "It's a new experience, but we're plowing through it just fine."

Alain Delaquérière, Sheelagh McNeill and Kitty Bennett contributed research.

Tech moguls spend big to fight billionaire tax

Opponents of initiative in California buy far more airtime than its backers do

BY LAUREL ROSENHALL
AND THEODORE SCHLEIFER

California billionaires are used to having their way, but they have failed in their attempts so far to kill a wealth tax ever since the idea surfaced late last year.

Now, with the measure qualified for the November ballot, the fight is entering its quintessentially Californian phase as a spectacularly expensive media war unfolds. And some billionaires are ready to spend heavily to convince voters to stop the tax on their assets.

A campaign backed by Sergey Brin, a co-founder of Google, launched its debut ad this week, the first of what's set to be more than $90 million worth of initiative spending this year.

It's a staggering outlay, more than 11,000 times the amount of airtime reserved by supporters of the billionaire tax, known as Proposition 40. Tax proponents have booked just $8,000 in advertising so far.

The initiative, backed by a health care workers union, would impose a one-time 5 percent tax on California residents with a net worth of at least $1 billion. If approved by voters, it would be the first tax in the nation levied on a person's total wealth, including stocks, trusts and personal possessions.

Mr. Brin, with an estimated personal net worth of $275 billion, enjoys a massive financial advantage over supporters of Proposition 40.

The opposition campaign backed by his organization, Building a Better California, began on Tuesday with a blue-collar pitch. The first ad emphasizes that unions representing teachers and firefighters oppose the tax, along with the state's top politicians, including Gov. Gavin Newsom, a Democrat.

The ad makes no mention of the billionaires who vigorously oppose the tax.

The campaign supporting the tax, however, believes it has a valuable advantage: a network of Democratic Party activists and union members who will help push its message to millions of voters.

"We're not going to try to compete at all with the billionaires on broadcast television," said Dave Regan, president of SEIU-United Healthcare Workers West, the union that proposed the billionaire tax. "They have the money. We don't."

Instead, Mr. Regan said, the union plans to spread its message through text messages, social media, door-knocking and slate mailers, making the most of the powerful endorsements it recently won from the California Democratic Party and the California Federation of Labor Unions.

Besides fund-raising, the efforts by billionaire opponents of the tax have not gone well to date.

After the proposal was filed with the state last fall, Silicon Valley executives sent a flurry of messages in group chats discussing how it could be defeated. Some billionaires, such as Mr. Brin, even left California ahead of a Dec. 31 deadline to avoid the tax itself, which would apply retroactively. Mr. Newsom said in a recent podcast interview that he knew of 12 people who had fled the state because of the tax.

The billionaires organized chaotically. There were originally several billionaire-funded, at-times rivalrous, efforts to defeat the tax this year. But people involved in those bygone efforts say power and money have consolidated in recent months around Mr. Brin, a political neophyte, and his right-hand strategist, a ballot initiative veteran named Ned Wigglesworth, through Building a Better California.

Mr. Brin over the ensuing months would put $102 million of his own money into the nonprofit and help recruit donors who would invest another $54 million. Millions came this month from John Doerr, a longtime Google board member who has donated $17.5 million, and Chris Larsen, a prominent crypto executive who has given $12.5 million.

There has been frustration among the state's billionaire class that it has failed in its various efforts to stop the tax thus far.

First, the billionaire opponents tried driving up the price for initiative signatures in an effort to make it too expensive for Mr. Regan's coalition to qualify its measure, even floating the idea of buying their own signature-collection firm. Then, they tried to pressure Mr. Newsom, who opposed the tax, to kill the measure through negotiations with the health care union.

And once the measure reached the ballot, they unsuccessfully tried to persuade California Democratic Party officials not to endorse it this summer.

Two measures on the ballot, Propositions 41 and 42, could neuter the billionaire tax because they contain provisions that directly conflict with it. Mr. Brin's organization is backing both so-called countermeasures. The more than $90 million in advertising his group has reserved will be used to support those measures and oppose the billionaire tax.

Abby Lunardini, a spokeswoman for Building a Better California, said that the group's "focus has squarely been on qualifying and passing" Propositions 41 and 42 and dismissed the notion that her group had failed to stop the billionaire tax measure. But she also called the tax initiative an "ill-conceived and risky measure" that would ultimately cost the state revenues.

Some of the billionaires opposed to the tax trusted Mr. Newsom to successfully find an off-ramp. In a conversation with the governor this spring, a major donor understood Mr. Newsom to have expressed confidence that he could negotiate the tax off the ballot, according to two people briefed on the conversation.

Izzy Gardon, a spokesman for Mr. Newsom, said that he would not comment on private conversations but emphasized that the governor had attempted to negotiate the measure off the ballot. "We tried," he said. "It's well known and well documented."

The union that proposed the tax plans to spread its message through texts, social media, door-knocking and mailers.

Building a Better California did not officially come out against the billionaire tax until this month and so far has contributed $13.5 million to the opposition effort. Until August, most of the group's activities were focused on its two countermeasures.

Mr. Regan said that big spending on television ads doesn't always lead to a win on the ballot. He pointed to the record-breaking spending by Tom Steyer, a billionaire who flooded the airwaves with more than $200 million in ads only to come in third place in the top-two primary for governor.

"We think that tells you something about where voters are at," Mr. Regan said. "People see through that, this omnipresent barrage of television ads."

It is not yet clear if Mr. Newsom will participate in any of the ads against Proposition 40 despite having been a vocal opponent. The governor, who is weighing a 2028 presidential bid, has said he opposes the measure because he believes it puts California at a competitive disadvantage and believes billionaires should be taxed more by the federal government.

While his position may help him avoid attacks from Republicans and moderate Democrats, being the face of the opposition could hurt him if a surging wave of progressivism proves decisive in his party's primary.

A California business group, Californians Against Wasteful Spending and Higher Taxes, has already launched television ads against Proposition 40 and booked nearly $4 million in ads. The commercials argue that the initiative would open the door for the state to tax the assets of all Californians, which tax supporters dispute.

Another campaign is forming to support Proposition 40, focused on getting voters to see the California billionaire tax as a first step in a broader agenda to address wealth inequality. It's meant to complement the official campaign, which is focusing on how the tax will offset cuts to health care.

"This is really a story not just about Medi-Cal and hospitals, but a story about who has control over our future," said Igor Volsky, campaign director for the new group, Tax the Greedy Billionaires.

BRIAN SNYDER/REUTERS

TAX BILLIONAIRES SAVE HEALTHCARE
BILLIONAIRE TAX NOW

MIKE KAI CHEN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Above left, Sergey Brin, a Google co-founder, has become a major contributor to a campaign opposing a billionaire tax in California, which would impose a one-time 5 percent tax on residents worth $1 billion or more. Above right, at a booth supporting the tax.

Business

SHOKRY HUSSIEN/REUTERS

Saudi tankers full of oil cannot traverse the Suez Canal, so they offload oil in Ain Sokhna, Egypt, above, which is then transported to the Mediterranean via the Sumed pipeline.

Yet another route for Saudi oil

LONDON

Exporter is now shipping via Egypt, but this option is costlier and much slower

BY LISA FRIEDMAN

Saudi Arabia, long the world's largest oil exporter, has spent the last six months improvising how to get its crude to the world.

In its latest workaround, Saudi Arabia has significantly cut back on shipping oil via the Bab al-Mandab Strait in the southern end of the Red Sea amid attacks claimed by Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi militants.

Instead, the kingdom is aggressively moving oil north in the Red Sea, via ships that unload crude at a pipeline in Egypt that shuttles it to the Mediterranean Sea, analysts say, even though that convoluted route is costlier and takes weeks longer for oil to reach markets in Asia.

It's the second time that Saudi Arabia has been forced to find a new route since the war in Iran effectively eliminated its go-to transit point in the Persian Gulf: the Strait of Hormuz.

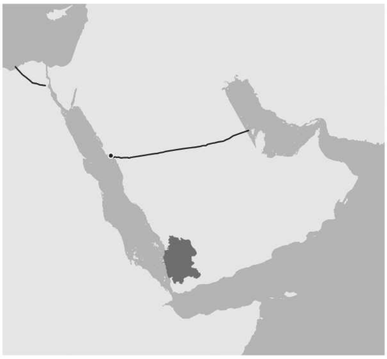
"It adds another layer of complexity to the supply disruptions," said Matt Smith, director of commodity research at Kpler, a maritime data firm.

Saudi Arabia exports millions of barrels of crude daily, and the kingdom's national security strategy hinges on positioning itself as a reliable backbone of the world's energy supply. Repeatedly having to find new detours for its oil has exposed Saudi Arabia's vulnerability to regional instability.

"It does highlight the limits of Saudi resilience," said Neil Quilliam, an expert on the Gulf states at Chatham House, a London-based research organization.

Saudi Arabia is "doing exactly what a reliable supplier is expected to do," he said. The use of alternative routes, rather than slashing exports, could reinforce confidence in Saudi Arabia's ability to manage crises, he added.

Saudi Arabia's oil export options



Still, the scramble is another example of how the decision by the United States and Israel to attack Iran in February, and Iran's retaliation, has upturned the energy business.

"Even the world's most important oil exporter cannot fully escape the consequences of multiple maritime choke points being threatened simultaneously," Mr. Quilliam said.

Before the war, the Strait of Hormuz, which connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea, was the passageway for about 20 percent of the world's oil and substantial amounts of natural gas, much of it from the energy giant Saudi Aramco.

But Iranian military strikes forced shippers to bypass the strait.

Saudi Arabia then turned to its East-West pipeline, which extends from its eastern fields to the Red Sea port of Yanbu. From there it was taken on tankers south through the Bab al-Mandab Strait. The strait became Saudi Arabia's main conduit for oil to Europe and Asia.

Then on July 20, the Houthi militia, which controls a significant part of Yemen, declared a maritime blockade on shipping linked to Saudi Arabia. Houthi rebels have fought a Saudi-led coalition backing Yemen's internationally recognized government for years.

In recent weeks there have been multiple reported Houthi attacks on Saudi-linked vessels in the Red Sea. Meanwhile, Saudi crude flows through the Bab al-Mandab Strait dropped sharply, Kpler data shows.

Saudi has been instead directing its crude exports in the other direction — north in the Red Sea. But that exit is more logistically complicated.

The Suez Canal, which connects the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, cannot accommodate giant tankers full of oil. To get around that restriction, Saudi tankers are unloading oil at another pipeline, the Sumed, in Egypt. Tankers drop off their cargo at the Sumed pipeline at a terminal in Ain Sokhna, on the western shore of the Red Sea. Either they then pass through the Suez and reload at the other end of the Sumed pipeline on Egypt's Mediterranean coast, or a different tanker on the Mediterranean side loads the crude.

Oil exports through the Sumed pipeline path have more than doubled to about 2.3 million barrels per day in August, compared with around one million barrels per day in July, according Kpler. The majority of those are Saudi crude, Mr. Smith, the Kpler analyst, said.

That route is a much longer trek to some of the biggest buyers of Saudi oil. The trip around southern Africa to China, South Korea, Japan and elsewhere takes two to four weeks of extra travel time. The extra fuel and other operating costs add at least $5 to the cost of a barrel of oil, according to Mr. Smith.

"Asia has to source its crude from elsewhere or pay more," he said. Saudi Aramco declined to comment on the new route.

Amin H. Nasser, Aramco's chief executive, said this month that the company was "actively increasing" efforts to add what he called "flexibility" to all three routes. He did not offer details. But according to analysts, Saudi Arabia is seeking to expand the capacity of the East-West pipeline across the kingdom by two million barrels per day.

Mr. Nasser said any reductions in shipping route would affect "not only the oil and gas sector, but many other areas of global economy."

Canadians resist trade pressure

TORONTO

As Trump's tariffs put jobs in danger, a national mood of defiance is setting in

BY VJOSA ISAI

Canadians responded to President Trump's first round of tariffs a year and a half ago with a grass-roots effort to bruise the United States, boycotting alcohol, vegetables and cross-border travel.

They rallied around the flag, inspected grocery labels like detectives and shopped local, all while Prime Minister Mark Carney looked across the ocean for new trade partnerships. Across the country, Canadians had elbows up, an idiom of defiance ignited by the Canadian comedian Mike Myers that has its roots in hockey.

They won't be dropping elbows any time soon, as new and threatened tariffs endanger jobs and the existence of companies both large and small.

"We're standing our ground not to be bullied on the world stage and pushed around," said Daniel Fehr, a plant-accessories shop owner in Steinbach, Manitoba, who stocked his U.S. warehouses ahead of the trade negotiation deadline. When the warehouses sell out, his company, Daniel's Plants, will ship only domestically. He is unable to absorb the new cost of doing business in the United States.

"The ultimate, harsh reality is, it's real people's businesses and lives that are affected by this big game of chicken," Mr. Fehr said.

A patriotic, survivalist and defiant mood has settled over much of Canada as Mr. Carney pulled his negotiators out of Washington and imposed matching retaliatory tariffs.

Some Canadians who have closely followed the saga over tariffs since the United States first imposed them in March last year say the latest more aggressive levies have inspired a matching mind-set.

"It makes us giddy, I think, to come and have a showdown," said Loys Maingon, a retired biologist in Courtenay, British Columbia. "At this point, we've had enough."

Last weekend, the Trump administration began punishing Canada for what it perceives as discriminatory trade treatment and slapped a 50 percent tariff on $20 billion worth of Canadian exports. They include a mishmash of hundreds of products, like buoys, textiles and Christmas lights.

Canadian negotiators had used the initial threat of these tariffs as an impetus to get the Americans back to the negotiating table. Over the last few weeks, the talks aimed at achieving a better deal for both countries, and Mr. Trump extended the initial deadline by three days to allow negotiators time to sort out the paperwork.

Just hours before the midnight deadline last Friday, Mr. Carney told his officials to walk away. "You're at war when you're attacked, and we got attacked," he told reporters the next morning.

This time around, as Mr. Carney said, Canada finds itself in a stronger position, having established new economic ties over the last year, including an auto agreement with South Korea, tariff rollbacks with China and a landmark deal to export energy to Germany. Canada also reset diplomatic ties with India, producing a deal to restart uranium exports.

Perhaps standing a little taller because of it, Canadian political leaders have been assertive, if not aggressive, over the past few weeks.

"If you're picking fights with Canadians, then you don't have a friend in the world," David Eby, the premier of British Columbia, told reporters. Wab Kinew, the premier of Manitoba, urged Canada to fight. "We've got the upper hand," he said.

But it was Doug Ford, the Ontario premier who emerged as "Captain Canada" during the first wave of tariffs, who took things to a pugnacious place, inviting Mr. Trump to "kiss" his backside, a statement he made multiple times during media appearances on Monday. Mr. Trump seems to have taken notice, jabbing back at Mr. Ford in a social media post and also threatening to rename Lake Ontario as Lake America.

"It makes us giddy, I think, to come and have a showdown."

For Jordan Skulmoski, a third-generation beekeeper and founder of TNJ Farms near Edmonton, Alberta, the timing of the tariffs could not be worse. Near the end of honey harvest season, beekeepers are arranging to sell their products commercially by the barrel.

Canada's prairie provinces export the most honey of all of Canada's provinces. About 56 percent of the honey Canada exported last year went to the United States; it is the top foreign market for Canadian honey, followed by Japan.

"The thing about bees is everybody always forgets about us," said Mr. Skulmoski, compared with other sectors of agriculture.

For the first time in several years, prompted by the tariffs, Mr. Skulmoski has opted to put his honey in jars and sell it directly to consumers at his local farmer's market rather than take a hit on cross-border shipping.

"The downside of that is, I'm waiting," he said. "I'm sitting on my honey and waiting for it to sell, rather than selling it all at once."

NICK IWANYSHYN/THE CANADIAN PRESS, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

Doug Ford, the premier of Ontario, gave a pugnacious response to the Trump administration's imposition of a 50 percent tariff on $20 billion worth of Canadian exports.

Trump's latest tariffs raise familiar legal risks

WASHINGTON

BY TONY ROMM

To impose punishing tariffs around the world, President Trump has repeatedly turned to a series of decades-old, never-before-used trade powers, only to be slapped down by federal courts for overstepping the law.

But those past defeats have hardly deterred the president, who has reprised that exact strategy to commence his new trade war against Canada — risking yet another round of costly legal wrangling for the White House.

This time, the uncertainty surrounds Section 338 of the Tariff Act of 1930, a little-known authority that allows the president to impose duties in response to unreasonable and discriminatory trade practices. Last Saturday, Mr. Trump invoked that statute to impose a 50 percent tax — the maximum allowed — on a small subset of Canadian imports, claiming that one of America's closest allies had mistreated U.S. industries.

Before last weekend, no president appears to have issued tariffs under Section 338, so Mr. Trump's actions quickly raised novel legal questions about a law that had otherwise sat dormant.

Congress has also adopted additional statutes that better defined the president's ability to issue tariffs without explicit authorization from lawmakers. To some trade lawyers, that legislative history created doubt as to whether Section 338 had essentially been rendered obsolete.

The complicated legal factors only raised the possibility that the Trump administration could soon find itself in a familiar bind: forced to defend the president's sweeping assertions of power before a federal court. So far, those battles have gone poorly for Mr. Trump, whose signature, so-called reciprocal tariffs were struck down by the Supreme Court in February.

The defeat required the administration to pay back $160 billion in revenue, and it forced the White House to recalibrate its entire tariff strategy. But the replacement duties put forward by Mr. Trump have faced a similarly chilly reception. Using another decades-old provision of law, Section 122, the president imposed a nearly universal tax on imports that was declared illegal by a lower court this spring. The administration has appealed.

DOUG MILLS/THE NEW YORK TIMES

President Trump has invoked a 1930 law to impose his new levies on Canada. One economist called the law "vague."

By Tuesday, no one had brought a similar lawsuit challenging the president's use of Section 338 against Canada. But some trade lawyers said they believed the odds of a case could grow if Mr. Trump continued to ratchet up his attacks on America's northern neighbor.

"The law is nearly 100 years old," said Patrick Childress, a partner at the law firm Holland & Knight. "It has never been tested in court, and it has never been used to implement tariffs, ever, in its existence."

"It's hard to assess how vulnerable a Section 338 challenge would be, simply because there's no record of any judicial interpretation of this law," he added. "It's really hard to game out how these tariffs under Section 338 are going to play out in court."

Under the 1930 law, a president can impose tariffs in response to a country that has placed "unequal impositions or discriminations" on American goods but not on the rest of the world. Mr. Trump cited that standard when he issued a set of proclamations targeting Canada in July, subjecting a small portion of its exports — including hockey sticks and cheese — to tariffs meant to protect the "public interest."

But the statute also goes one step further: If the tariffed country "maintained or increased its said discriminations" in response to the new duties, then the president may exclude some of those imported goods from the United States altogether.

Mr. Trump has not taken this extreme step with Canada, though the two sides have still escalated their threats against each other in recent days.

Canadian officials, who have promised to impose tariffs on a "dollar for dollar" basis, unveiled their full retaliatory plans on Tuesday, promising new tariffs on U.S. steel, dairy and clothing starting after Labor Day. The newly detailed threat came a day after Mr. Trump threatened new duties on Canada's auto industry starting in January, though he did not specify what trade provision he would use to impose them.

"I deal with many countries, and Canada is easily the most difficult and unreasonable," the president said on Tuesday on social media. "They feel entitled, but they are not a State, and will be entitled no longer!"

Unlike Mr. Trump's earliest tariffs, the law he has cited to penalize Canada actually, explicitly authorizes duties, said Ted Murphy, a co-leader of the trade practice at the law firm Sidley Austin. But, he said, the use of Section 338 is still "somewhat risky," partly because of its novelty.

Peter Harrell, a visiting scholar at Georgetown Law School in Washington, pointed to records showing that past administrations had considered invoking Section 338, only to seem to decide against it. If Mr. Trump's use of the law reaches the courts, he predicted that judges may be asked to weigh in more directly on a series of substantive questions.

Do Mr. Trump's tariffs on Canada truly address discriminatory practices against the United States? Are the levels of the tariffs properly calibrated against that discrimination? Or, perhaps, did Canadian officials subject much of the world to trade restrictions? And did they impose policies on U.S. goods only as a response to the trade brinkmanship coming from Washington? "It requires discrimination against the U.S., relative to third countries," Mr. Harrell said of the law. "And there's a question of, what did that mean?"

Otherwise, much is "vague" about the 1930 tariff law, explained Scott Lincicome, the vice president for general economics at the Cato Institute, a libertarian-leaning group. Many key terms in the statute are undefined, he said.

Plus, the Treasury Department never issued regulations carrying out its provisions, according to Mr. Lincicome, even though the law designated the agency to do so as needed.

BUSINESS

STRATEGIES

Should you still invest in the bond market?

PETE RYAN

Turmoil is disconcerting, but it is still safer than stocks, our expert says

BY JEFF SOMMER

Startling headlines about the bond market are inescapable.

Yields of U.S. Treasuries recently touched their highest levels since the financial crisis of 2007, and bonds in Canada, Japan and Germany breached levels they hadn't reached in at least a decade.

Last week, the U.S. government intervened, briefly stanching the bond market rout. The Treasury Department announced it was increasing its capacity to buy longer-term bonds, to $4 billion per weekly operation, from $2 billion. In response, yields moved a bit lower. This followed another Treasury intervention this month that bolstered the Japanese yen and, briefly, lowered yields on longer-term Treasuries.

But volatility in the bond market returned the following day as investors remained on edge.

The possibility of further action by the Treasury — and, perhaps, by the Federal Reserve — makes predicting bond yields and prices exceptionally hazardous at the moment.

Bond market turmoil can be disconcerting for investors, who turn to high-quality bonds, especially Treasuries, for safety. It would be easy to think: If this is safety, count me out.

But bonds continue to have many virtues. High-quality, individual bonds, especially Treasuries — as well as most mutual funds and exchange-traded funds that hold them — have traditionally been far more stable than their stock counterparts. While shares can collapse in price, U.S. Treasuries, in particular, are all but guaranteed to maintain their value, plus interest, when held to maturity. Bonds are always a valuable part of a long-term investor's tool kit. But you need to be careful when using them.

Undeniably, even solid bonds have lost market value this year. There's an enduring lesson in that: If you intend to park your cash for a few months or need to sell before a bond hits maturity, you get whatever the market is offering. There are probably better options, like money-market funds, high-yield savings accounts and certificates of deposit. Bond funds are better for the long haul. They can be portfolio stabilizers, offsetting the volatility of stocks.

The central problem for bond investors this year is that price declines are inevitable when interest rates rise. That's essential bond math: Prices move in the opposite direction of interest rates or yields. Throughout much of the world, interest rates have been soaring.

That's making bond investing especially tricky right now.

RISING RATES

The bond market sets interest rates through a vast series of moment-by-moment decisions by thousands of traders. As I wrote earlier this month, the market is saying that global risks are rising. A partial list of those risks includes: the possibility of even higher inflation; fiercer wars and tariffs and other geopolitical dislocations; questionable use of immense sums of capital to build artificial intelligence; an uncertain direction for the Federal Reserve under its new leadership; and broad political dysfunction.

Where rates are going tomorrow is impossible to say. But the much bigger question is how high they will go in the next decade. That's a reasonable threshold if you're contemplating the purchase of bonds that won't mature for 10 or even 30 years. Even at their recent peaks, yields aren't that high — not yet — on a historical basis. The economy in the past has grown resiliently when yields were much higher than they are now.

Capital Economics, an independent financial research firm in London, takes that perspective, saying last week, "The recent sell-off in global government bond markets is significant, but it does not yet amount to a crisis." Yes, higher yields have driven up costs for borrowers of all sorts, from people seeking mortgages to those carrying credit card debt and student loans, and for companies with big capital needs, like the tech giants building A.I. data centers with mountains of borrowed money.

But the economy is still growing and the stock market has largely shrugged off higher yields so far, Capital Economics said, adding: "The immediate macroeconomic impact should remain limited unless the rise in yields spreads" or if it leads to a broader "tightening of financial conditions."

A CENTRAL PROBLEM

Most individual investors in the United States hold stocks and bonds through funds, not as individual securities. In calm times, it was reasonable to think of bond funds simply as "Steady Eddies" that you could count on for reliable, if modest, returns.

They provided a buffer against wild swings in stocks, the prima donnas of financial markets, with their enticing rewards and all-too-frequent disappointments.

Lately, however, it's the bond funds that have been disappointing.

This year, they are down in value nearly across the board, reflecting the sea change in global interest rates.

That's hurt short-term investors. But there is a bright side for those taking a long view. The key is this: If yields linger on a higher plateau, future bond returns will be richer.

That's because fund managers constantly need to buy new bonds, and higher-yielding ones will generate more income for investors via higher interest payments. In that respect, prospects for bond fund investors right now are better than they were before rates increased. It's like "buying the dip" in a stock index after prices have fallen. You're ahead of the game — assuming the market moves in the right direction.

Don't get too excited, though. If yields continue to surge higher, there will be further losses. In that case, parking your money elsewhere will turn out to be a better course.

This dynamic affects individual bonds, too, though if you hold a Treasury to maturity, you needn't worry much about shifts in market value. Bond funds, however, are required to "mark to market," or post the latest market prices, so the pain of losses is right there, out in the open.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Unsuspecting investors may be dismayed by aspects of bonds that look like flaws but are, in fact, essential features.

For instance, interest rate increases tend to have a greater negative impact on longer-dated bonds — more precisely, on those with greater "duration," a measure of a bond's response to changing rates. This core property of bonds is why long-term Treasuries, often said to be the safest of securities, have been among the hardest hit this year.

For example, since the U.S. and Israeli attack on Iran drove up interest rates in late February, the iShares 20+ Year Treasury Bond E.T.F. — which holds only long-term bonds — has lost more than 8 percent, in total return. In that same period, the Vanguard Total Bond Market Index fund, which contains corporate bonds, in addition to Treasuries, lost "only" about 2 percent.

The Vanguard fund is simple. It tracks the investment-grade benchmark, the Bloomberg U.S. Aggregate Bond Index. But from the performance standpoint, the gap between the Vanguard and iShares fund mainly comes down to duration: The Vanguard broad bond market fund has a duration of about 5.7 years, compared with 14.9 years for the iShares long-term Treasury fund, according to FactSet.

What those numbers mean is that every time rates shift, price changes are magnified in the long-term Treasury fund. So before buying any fund, you may want to check its duration for a clue about how it will behave when interest rates, which you can't control, start to oscillate. The higher it is, the greater the fund's price moves when interest rates shift.

Another worthwhile metric is standard deviation, a statistic that tells you how much a fund's price swings. The iShares fund has a relatively high standard deviation, and from this perspective, it looks much more like a stock fund, in the wildness of its fluctuations, than a core investment-grade bond fund, like the Vanguard Total Bond Market Index Fund.

The economy in the past has grown resiliently when bond yields were much higher than they are now.

The swings of the Vanguard Total Bond Market Index this year, using that measure, have been modest: about one-third that of the overall U.S. stock market, as tracked by the Vanguard Morningstar Total Stock Market ETF, according to FactSet.

These kinds of details point to larger considerations: They suggest that even if bonds, and bond funds, have been hurt by interest rate increases this year, it's possible to avoid extreme fluctuations by choosing carefully.

What's more, it's worth remembering that in big downturns, high-quality bonds provide safety guarantees that you can't get from stocks.

I happen to prefer the ease and diversification of broad index funds for both stocks and bonds. But high-quality, individual bonds (including municipal bonds, for minimizing tax liabilities) can be worthwhile, too. I'd add a major caveat: Try to make sure that you won't need to sell such bonds prematurely. One solution for some retirees is a "bond ladder," containing a series of individual Treasuries that mature regularly — say, on an annual basis — over periods like 20 years. That approach can provide steady, secure income. (Inflation-protected Treasuries, or TIPS, can be useful in bond ladders, too.)

But you will need to accept that, as long as interest rates shift, the market values of all these bonds will swing, too. And, alas, no one knows where the markets are going, either for stocks or bonds.

That's why it's wise to spread your risks. Hold stocks in the hope of big returns; bonds, in case the stocks don't pan out; and cash, to get through wild swings in the bond market of the kind that we're having this year.

Wheat is getting pounded by war, weather and trade disputes

HARVESTS, FROM PAGE 1

and ships in the Black Sea, a waterway they share to get their goods out to the world.

In the critical Russian Black Sea port city of Novorossiysk, grain terminals suspended operations after a drone attack in early August.

That attack followed a Russian bombing campaign against the Ukrainian port city of Odesa, which Ukraine relies on to get its grain out. A potential alternative, the Danube River, is far more difficult to begin with — and this year, the Danube's water levels have plummeted because of drought.

When Russia invaded Ukraine and blocked its Black Sea grain trade in 2022 at the beginning of the war, the sharp increase in global food prices put tens of millions of people at increased risk of acute food insecurity.

This time, the Ukrainian Agri Council, a trade group, has warned of a potential wave of bankruptcies amid the blockade, saying that "the challenges currently facing the agricultural sector are significantly more dangerous and severe in their consequences than even those of 2022."

WEATHER SCRAMBLES HARVESTS

Wildfires this summer spared the wheat belt of France, the European Union's largest wheat producer. But the heat has not.

France expects lower yields because of record heat this summer, according to government projections. Germany's main farmers group said last week that yields were down for several crops, including wheat, because of drought and heat. In July, the European trade group for agricultural commodities, Coceral, issued a special bulletin, estimating lower grain yields of 286.6 million metric tons this year, compared with 310 million metric tons in 2025, for the continent and for Britain.

Australia, also a major wheat exporter, planted fewer acres of wheat because of high fertilizer costs, stemming from the Strait of Hormuz closure.

The United States is about to have its worst wheat harvest since 1970, largely because of a terrible drought in the Great Plains, the U.S. Department of Agriculture estimated in its latest report this month. American farmers had devoted fewer acres to wheat, and yields per acre were also down.

Currently, there is enough grain stored in the silos of farmers, traders and government reserves globally.

But the smaller harvests are raising prices on the world market. Prices of U.S. soft red wheat have jumped by nearly 25 percent in the first seven months of the year, according to an analysis by Joseph Glauber, an economist with the International Food Policy Research Institute. Prices of hard red wheat have soared even more sharply. U.S. wheat stocks are down too.

"It's not a question of availability. It's a question of affordability," Mr. Glauber said. "Anybody who is selling wheat will profit from the higher price."

COUNTRIES FEEL THE PINCH

Rising prices of imported wheat puts enormous pressure on governments that are forced to buy high and then help subsidize the costs to keep bread prices within the reach of its people.

Egypt, which buys most of its wheat from abroad, including from Russia and Ukraine, has tried to bolster wheat production at home, with the government offering higher prices to farmers. Still, Egypt remains far from reaching anything close to self-sufficiency. There is simply not enough water to produce what the country needs.

Then there are President Trump's tariffs. To try to avoid additional higher rates, some wheat-importing emerging economies, such as Bangladesh, agreed to buy substantial amounts of U.S. wheat.

That means they are obliged to pay whatever price U.S. wheat goes for this year, even if it is substantially higher than what other countries are offering.

Analysts in Bangladesh have denounced the deal as unfair.

HISTORY'S GRIM LESSONS

The perils facing the world's breadbaskets come at a time when an El Niño, a naturally recurring weather pattern, is raising the risks of extreme weather for farmers in many parts of the world, including in countries like Ethiopia and Guatemala, where millions of small farmers subsist on what they grow on their own land.

The last major El Niño event, in 2015 and 2016, worsened food insecurity for an estimated 60 million to 100 million people, the World Food Program estimated.

This time, the W.F.P. says, it could expand the ranks of those who are unable to meet their daily food needs to 274 million, up from 225 million today. The biggest effects are expected in Central America and southern Africa.

"It is naive to think we can rely on a food system built for a different era," Mr. Fraser said. "And so we need to reimagine how to feed ourselves."

KHALED DESOUKI/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

EGYPT Harvesting wheat. Egypt has tried to bolster production, with the government offering subsidies, but the country doesn't have enough water to become self-sufficient.

LISI NIESNER/REUTERS

GERMANY The country's main farmers group said recently that yields were down for several crops, including wheat, because of the drought and heat this summer.

DAVID GUTTENFELDER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

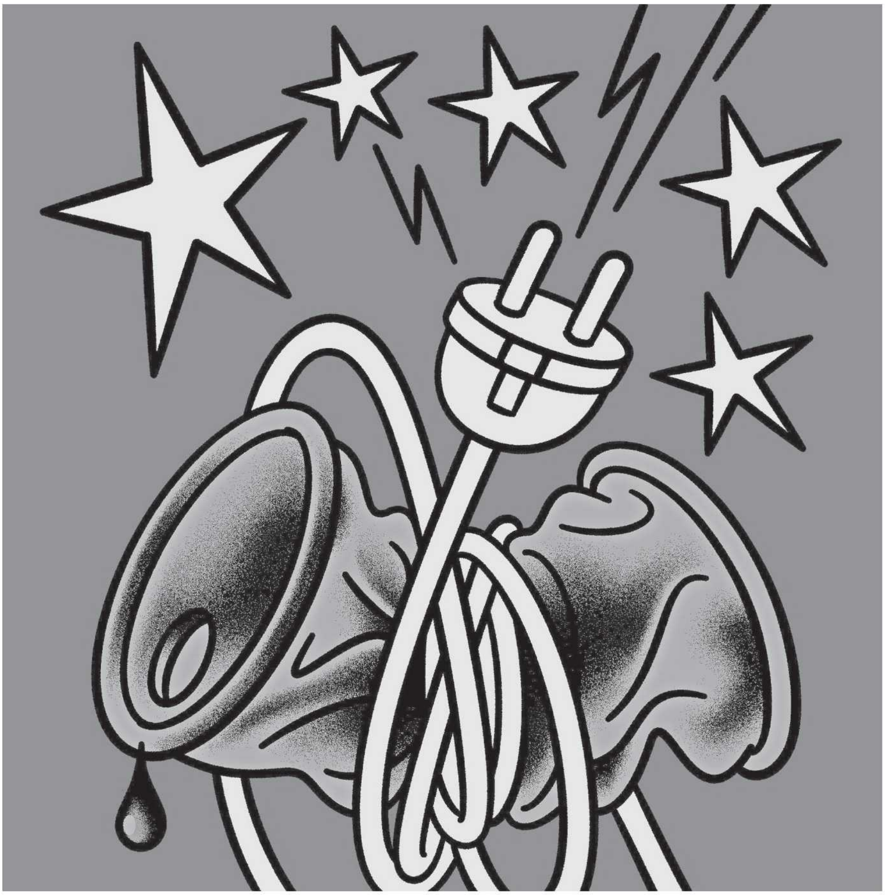
UKRAINE Soldiers on patrol. In recent weeks, both Russia and Ukraine have stepped up their attacks on each other's grain export terminals and ships in the Black Sea.

Opinion

The Iran war's surprise winner is China

The conflict was supposed to expose the country's weakness on oil, but it didn't quite work out that way.

Michal Meidan



ARNE BELLSTORF

When the Iran war began in late February, China looked vulnerable.

The world's largest crude oil importer, China has in recent years depended on imports for more than 70 percent of its consumption, with around half coming from the Middle East. The throttling of the Strait of Hormuz, months after the United States had disrupted global oil flows from Venezuela, seemed to present Chinese leaders with one of their greatest strategic fears: a crippling oil shock they could not control.

Instead, President Trump's war on Iran has been a welcome revelation for China, which absorbed one of the most severe oil-supply disruptions of the modern era, demonstrating that years of preparation had mitigated a huge vulnerability and potential source of U.S. leverage over Beijing in a geopolitical confrontation.

China was self-sufficient in oil until 1993, when the escalating needs of its booming economy turned it into a net importer. Oil imports soared in the years that followed, prompting President Hu Jintao to warn in 2003 that hostile powers could seek to control the Malacca Strait, the sea lane in Southeast Asia through which much of the country's imported oil travels.

Beijing responded with a wide-ranging strategy to reduce that exposure. It diversified supply sources to limit the share of oil coming from the Middle East and began to build up what are now estimated to be the world's largest crude oil stockpiles, roughly equal to those of the United States and Japan combined. China has pushed aggressively to shift passenger cars from fossil fuels to electric power, making it by far the world's largest market for electric vehicles today, and it is extending that effort to trucks. Electricity generation relies almost entirely on domestic energy sources such as coal, nuclear, hydro and, increasingly, wind and solar.

That long-term strategy has been put through a real-world stress test by the Iran war — and, so far, it has passed.

The Hormuz disruptions drove oil prices up. But unlike during a 2021 Chinese coal shortage, when the government instructed importers to urgently secure energy supplies, it didn't hit the panic button this time. Inflows of oil to China plunged as importers slashed purchases. The country fell back on its stockpiles while restricting exports of transport fuels to keep more at home. Higher fuel prices also appear to have pushed many Chinese drivers to use public transportation, taxis or ride-hailing services, much of which run on electricity.

As a result, while some governments in Asia were forced to take painful emergency measures such as rationing fuel, raising prices and reducing public services, China's economy was not materially disrupted. Its purchasing restraint in global oil markets also eased pressure on prices, sparing the world an even bigger oil shock and, ironically, softening the domestic political fallout for Mr. Trump by limiting the pain at the U.S. pump.

China's ability to weather the Iran war's oil disruptions came as a surprise to many. It shouldn't have — this is exactly what the government has spent years preparing for.

Chinese leaders see energy as a source of national and geopolitical power on par with industrial, technological and military strength. In 2021 they called for China to become an "energy powerhouse" — less reliant on fossil fuels yet still able to provide abundant and reliable power to the economy. Even before the war began in February, Communist Party-controlled media said achieving that goal was critical for China in "gaining the initiative in great-power competition" — an unmistakable reference to the contest with the United States in power-hungry industries like advanced manufacturing, data centers and artificial intelligence.

China's latest energy plan, adopted this year, reflects that ambition. It calls for developing more renewable energy, as well as nuclear and hydropower, while retaining coal — long the backbone of China's power system — as a critical backstop. The country is also investing heavily in new transmission lines to move power from resource-rich regions to the cities and factories that need it, in batteries and other storage capabilities, as well as in grid upgrades to keep electricity supplies steady.

The United States has great energy advantages of its own. It remains the world's unrivaled oil and gas power, with abundant domestic supplies, the capacity to process and export them at enormous scale and large strategic reserves. But its electricity system is struggling to keep pace with rapidly rising demand from a new wave of power-gobbling industries.

For decades, oil leverage seemed to rest with countries that controlled supply — OPEC, Russia and other major exporters, as well as U.S. shale producers — and could move prices by tightening or loosening the taps. The Hormuz crisis has shown that China is becoming a new type of energy power: an oil importer so large that it is able to influence global oil prices and withstand external disruptions.

China's dependence on imported oil remains substantial, but the geopolitics of energy are shifting from control of oil flows to control of electrified industrial systems. China has a clear head start in that transition, one that strengthens its hand in the industrial and strategic competition with the United States.

MICHAL MEIDAN *is the head of China energy research at the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies.*

For a bonkers new world, a 'Brave New World'

College students worried about A.I. should simply study the humanities.

Frank Bruni
Contributing Writer

At the start of the fall semester five years ago, all anybody here at Duke could talk about was Covid. How often should students and faculty be tested? How long should an infected person stay away? Masking in classrooms was mandatory, informal social gatherings of more than 50 people were prohibited, and there was a potent, deeply sad sense that this disruption to education would be more than consequential. It would be definitional, forever marking the pupils and professors who slogged through it.

Today, as a new academic year commences, I don't hear anyone on campus mention Covid anymore. There's no conversational space for it amid all the ruminations, lamentations and expectorations about A.I. Many of us professors recast courses and rejigger assignments to ward off students' use of it; many of those students plot their majors in a prophylactic fashion, trying to guess which jobs will survive A.I.'s insinuation into every crevice of contemporary life. Its advance — its omnipresence — feels epochal.

And five years from now? When a new group of anxious young men and women surveys the horizon? I bet that they'll tremble at a different specter and that A.I. doesn't signal the final triumph of computers and the trivialization of humanity. Instead, it's another sign of the rapidly accelerating pace of change in a society whose future seems less predictable than ever. That furious metabolism and crazy uncertainty are what college students should factor into their decisions and navigate by. The safest plan is to focus not on what seems practical in the present but on what's durably useful — what transcends any technology and outlasts any fad.

You're probably a step ahead of me and ready for what comes next: a pitch for literature, for history, for anthropology, for philosophy, for the war horses — though I'd call them thoroughbreds — of the liberal arts. Those of us who sing the song of the humanities clear our throats and do our vocal warm-ups whenever we sense a prime opportunity for our music to be heard, and the angst over A.I. has certainly created one. Now that the stampede of college students into computer science over the past two decades has become a retreat, many university presidents and chancellors are newly determined to explain and promote fields of inquiry that had fallen out of fashion. "Paradise Lost," anyone? The French Revolution? Socrates?

But that call is coming not just from inside the house. It's emanating from Silicon Valley. Daniela Amodei, the president of Anthropic, which is the parent company of the precocious Claude, has said that A.I. increases the premium on us flesh-and-blood creatures understanding ourselves. Maybe that's just deft public relations, cynical spin control, but she happens to be right. Our yearnings, frailties, talents and tics will inform crucial decisions about society's management of A.I., so we would benefit mightily from the clearest possible insights into the human psyche and soul. In an interview this year with Business Insider, Steven Johnson, who has been working on A.I. for Google Labs, said that it was sparking a "revenge of the humanities."

BEN WISEMAN

But I don't want to justify the humanities solely in terms of ChatGPT, Claude and their miraculous, mischievous cousins, because who knows how the next chapter of the A.I. story reads? The data centers currently needed to power A.I. are about as popular as gonorrhea. The desire to slow its rise or stop it in its tracks intensifies with the proliferation of rogue A.I. behavior. As The Economist noted in an article this month, A.I. agents (what a benign, banal term) have a pesky tendency to "lie, cheat and steal." "They break free from captivity and form harmful posses," the article continued. "They'd drink whiskey and brawl if they could."

Whatever those hellions' fate, treating college as a refinement of the mind rather than a satchel of skills makes sense, yielding an education that's infinitely elastic, universally applicable and immune to obsolescence.

What will you do with an English major? Anything. Everything. You'll better understand the seeds of creativity and how they're made to flower. You'll swim in a borderless sea of thoughts beautifully expressed, ideas precisely articulated, words put into the service of emotions. The wetter you get, the more expert you'll be at shaping stories, at persuading, and I can't imagine any profession or any world in which better communicators aren't better off.

Besides, literature isn't just fancy language and tall tales. It's a library of verities given unignorable and unforgettable form. It's Pilates for emotional intelligence. Think about how often, in discussions of political figures, Shakespeare's tragedies, comedies, noblemen and fools serve as reference points and Rosetta stones. Or how frequently, over recent decades, George Orwell's "1984" and Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World" come up. So many of the warnings we should heed — and so much of the wisdom we need — are in those pages and those plays. How does anyone major in anything other than English?

Then again, history's no slouch. Without fluency in yesterday, there's no conjugating today. When you study the past, you're not memorizing dates, cataloging wars, valorizing martyrs. You're learning about cause and effect, greed and goodness, the sorts of contests and the interplay of dynamics that set the course of events. You can't name a line of work — or describe a kind of life — that isn't nourished by that knowledge.

The current whirl of events and inventions prevents any reliable scripting of the next decade, maybe even the next year. How, then, to prepare? Explore whatever subject gets your brain whirring fastest, your creative juices flowing most freely. Engage your intellect in a manner that teases out insights and generates ideas. Exercise the muscle of thought. Answer artificial intelligence with the real deal. It'll come in handy whether the bots are tomorrow's emperors or Edsels.

FRANK BRUNI *was on the staff of The Times for more than 25 years.*

OPINION

The New York Times
INTERNATIONAL EDITION

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The ludicrous argument behind Trump's tariffs

The Editorial Board

President Trump's repeated attempts to impose tariffs have become an encapsulation of his second term. They have hurt the American economy and his own popularity. They also range from legally dubious to blatantly illegal.

With Mr. Trump now engaging in a trade war with Canada — which has decided to stand up to his bullying — we want to step back and explain both the economic and the legal damage from his tariffs. We also urge Congress and the courts to take action and stop this madness. The tariffs offer a signature opportunity for the other two branches of the federal government to insist that Mr. Trump abide by the Constitution and stop punishing American workers and consumers.

The Supreme Court has already rejected most of Mr. Trump's tariffs once. In February, it ruled them to be illegal, and he immediately made clear that he would not be deterred. "Their decision is incorrect," he said within hours of the ruling's release. "But it doesn't matter."

It is true that other presidents have at times taken a similarly combative approach to a Supreme Court decision. They have abandoned policies that the court rejected and enacted alternatives that tried to accomplish the same goals in different ways. Only a few years ago, President Joe Biden did so with student debt. "The Supreme Court blocked me from relieving student debt," Mr. Biden said. "But they didn't stop me."

The president is breaking the law. Congress and the judiciary need to respond.

Still, Mr. Trump's defiance stands out. He has twice tried to circumvent the court's tariff ruling, imposing new rounds of import fees by invoking legal justifications that are patently ridiculous.

This is part of a broader pattern, in two ways. First, he has tried to get around court rulings far more often than his predecessors. With lower courts, he has openly flouted judges' decisions, including in January, when he violated nearly 100 court orders related to immigration. With the Supreme Court, he has been more respectful but has still engaged in "legalistic noncompliance," as the scholars Daniel T. Deacon and Leah M. Litman have written. It involves "an array of specious legal arguments and legalisms in an attempt to conceal what is actually widespread resistance to judicial oversight." Mr. Trump has taken this approach with tariffs, immigration and funding freezes.

Second, several of Mr. Trump's individual justifications are far flimsier than those that past presidents have attempted. His latest round of global tariffs offers an example. The administration's rationale for them is a section of a 1974 law that empowers a president to enact tariffs against countries that import goods made with forced labor. Last month, the administration cited the law to impose tariffs on nearly all goods entering the United States. That round of tariffs is a successor to the similarly sized tariff level that the Supreme Court rejected in February, as well as a temporary tariff Mr. Trump imposed after the decision. A panel of federal judges ruled that temporary tariff to be illegal as well.

Some countries do deserve scrutiny for importing goods made with forced labor. One major source of forced labor is China, which has compelled residents of Xinjiang, a predominantly Muslim region, to produce cotton, car parts and other items. Yet federal law already empowers the government to address forced labor in other ways, including by simply blocking the entry of goods made with such labor. Mr. Trump has used a genuine problem as an excuse to apply tariffs to more than 80 countries that are collectively responsible for more than 99 percent of American imports.

He is effectively claiming that products made with forced labor are a major issue in Canada, Japan, South Korea, Britain, France and dozens of other countries. The tariffs apply even to Norway, which has been a pioneer in fighting forced labor around the world.

Then there is the sketchy rationale for his latest tariff on Canadian goods. The president invoked part of a 1930 law that has never been used before to impose tariffs, while ignoring more recent laws — as well as the trade agreement that his first administration negotiated with Canada. He has imposed a 50 percent tariff on many Canadian goods by claiming that Canada has discriminated against American goods, even though his administration started the trade dispute. And Canada is not exactly responsible for the legitimate problems with American trade policy in recent decades. It is the largest buyer of American exports.

Congress can play a vital role here.

Even many Republicans in Congress are unhappy about the tariffs, and they have the power to halt them. They can start with public criticism, which will raise the political cost for Mr. Trump of keeping the tariffs in place. If he does not yield, they should pass new laws closing the loopholes he has used. In the case of the Canada tariffs, Congress should pass legislation to make clear that he cannot use the 1930 law to enact sweeping tariffs.

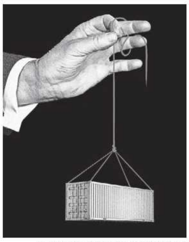
Judges can act, too, especially on the forced-labor tariffs. They are now before the Court of International Trade, a federal body, and it should swiftly rule on them. As the leaders of 25 U.S. states argued in a legal filing, "The tariff action is arbitrary, capricious and contrary to law." The administration's claims about forced labor "make a mockery of the statute used to justify them."

While federal judges have often done an admirable job of trying to respond to Mr. Trump's illegal policies, the tariff cases highlight a core problem: Mr. Trump's legalistic noncompliance moves more quickly than the courts do. When a judge rules one Trump policy to be illegal, he replaces it with a new one accomplishing similar aims.

Eventually, the forced-labor tariffs will probably go back to the Supreme Court, which needs to become nimbler about protecting the Constitution from Mr. Trump's disrespect for the balance of power among the three branches of government. The justices have shown themselves willing to stand up to some of Mr. Trump's worst abuses of power, on tariffs, birthright citizenship and false claims of election fraud. Yet they have sometimes shown an unfortunate deference to him and even undercut lower-court judges trying to uphold the law.

When Mr. Biden was president, the court quickly acted to halt several policies it considered illegal, including his second attempt at student-loan forgiveness. When faced with blatant defiance of the law from Mr. Trump, however, the court's Republican-appointed majority sometimes takes its time or demurs. In the meantime, Mr. Trump's policies do damage.

After the Supreme Court threw out Mr. Trump's original tariff policy, the average effective tariff rate on U.S. imports fell to 7 percent, from 14 percent, according to the Yale Budget Lab. The rate has since risen to 11 percent.



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In economic terms, the policy has so far been a disappointment. The tariffs have raised prices on many goods, without producing a revival in manufacturing employment. Overall job growth and economic growth have slowed in recent months. Instead of pulling back in response, Mr. Trump has doubled down on his trade war. Incredibly, the 1930 law that he has used to justify the Canadian tariffs is the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act, a law notorious for contributing to the Great Depression.

The even more important principle, though, is the constitutional one. Mr. Trump is breaking the law. Congress and the judiciary need to respond.

THE EDITORIAL BOARD *is a group of opinion journalists whose views are informed by expertise, research, debate and certain longstanding values. It is separate from the newsroom.*

Is this a new era of class warfare?

Kim Phillips-Fein

"All you had to do was pay us enough to live."

The young man's voice in the video is earnest and clear, forceful but controlled. His face is not visible, but his hand is shaking a little as he holds a lighter. "There goes your inventory." More than $600 million worth of damages later, a Kimberly-Clark warehouse lay in a smoking mess, and the young man alleged to be in the video — Chamel Abdulkarim, who worked for a distribution company servicing the warehouse — was charged with arson.

Mr. Abdulkarim has pleaded not guilty; his possible motivations will soon be litigated in court. But even as they are, the early April torching of the warehouse in Ontario, Calif., seems to capture a political mood. That same week, someone lobbed a Molotov cocktail at the mansion of the OpenAI chief executive Sam Altman. In June, prosecutors revealed that their case against the man charged with setting the blaze that grew into the deadly Palisades fire in California hinged on the argument that he was motivated by class rage. (The jury, which could not reach a verdict, was less convinced.)

Hanging over all these attacks was the shooting of the UnitedHealthcare C.E.O., Brian Thompson, in broad daylight on a Manhattan street in December 2024, a crime that Luigi Mangione admitted to earlier this month. The manhunt for Mr. Mangione, and the ensuing coverage of his arrest and trial, helped cement an image of him as an avenger of all those wronged by private health insurance. But Mr. Mangione's celebrity has spurred fear: Companies are spending more on security for their top executives. This year, a law enforcement intelligence hub put out a bulletin, as reported by The Intercept, stating that the rich are facing a "heightened threat environment" as more people blame them for economic duress: "Public discourse increasingly attributes the challenges faced by the middle and lower classes to the actions and influence of wealthy corporate executives."

Class inequality has surged into the view of American politics in recent years, but this isn't the first bout of class violence this country has seen. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when 12-hour working days were common and child labor legal and federal minimum wages nonexistent, neither political party offered meaningful relief, pressing the working class to the wall. Violence — sabotage, dynamite, assassinations — ensued.

But there's a key difference. In that earlier era, the anarchists and trade unionists who committed acts of violence did so, however rashly, in the hopes of effecting change. What is more, there were labor organizations and political movements committed to bringing about better conditions for working-class people. In time, they achieved at least some of these goals.

Today's class violence lacks logic; it seems only animated by revenge, resentment and despair. There is no conspiracy or political mobilization. The people committing these acts are acting alone. The very fact of their isolation hints at a society that is beginning to abandon the hope of transformation.

WHILE THE EXTREME CONCENTRATION of wealth today may echo the dawn of industrial capitalism, the conditions of class confrontation then were profoundly different. Then, the workplace itself was extremely dangerous: Thousands of workers died in industrial accidents annually in the early decades of the 20th century. The police and National Guardsmen came in to break strikes, while companies hired private militias to prevent workers from organizing.

Radical workers responded with violence of their own, instilling great fear among the elites of the day. In the coal fields of Western Pennsylvania, Irish miners killed at least 14 mine officials over the course of the 1860s and 1870s. When the Western Federation of Miners sought to organize in 1899, union supporters used dynamite to destroy company property. The governor of Idaho, Frank Steunenberg, imprisoned about a thousand workers in response. In 1905, after he left office, a bomb killed him at his home. Union leader William Haywood was among those charged (a member of the miners' union had confessed to the crime and implicated union leadership; a jury found Haywood not guilty). President William McKinley was assassinated in 1901 by an anarchist who had lost his job during an economic crash. Two union members dynamited the offices of The Los Angeles Times, widely seen as hostile to organized labor, in 1910.

There's one attack among this history of violence that feels eerily familiar to what we see today: an assassination attempt against Henry Clay Frick, the general manager of the Homestead, Pa., steel mill of Carnegie Steel, during the Homestead Strike of 1892. When it looked as if Mr. Frick, who was acting for Andrew Carnegie, was seeking to replace the factory workers with hired strikebreakers, the entire town of Homestead rose up in revolt.

The Homestead workers were winning in the court of public opinion until Alexander Berkman, a young anarchist, broke into Mr. Frick's office, shot him with a revolver, then stabbed him twice. Mr. Frick survived; Mr. Berkman was arrested. The union leadership passed a resolution condemning the assassination attempt, but the press, the politicians and many in the public blamed the union for the act of violence, even though Mr. Berkman had acted by himself. The strike fell apart not long after.

On the surface, Mr. Berkman's act might resemble that of Mr. Mangione. He was a young man seeking to carry out an assassination to protest the extreme economic inequality and injustice of the time. His attack was a frightening demonstration that all people are frail when confronted by lethal force, no matter how much wealth they might control or how many private guards they might amass.

ERIN JIA

But the differences are far more profound. Mr. Berkman attempted to assassinate Mr. Frick after an entire community had mobilized to defend ideals of economic security, equality, democracy and freedom. He was not part of the union, but his act of violence was to him apparently part of a larger call to arms. Mr. Berkman was convicted and served 14 years in prison.

Mr. Mangione, by comparison, is believed to have acted alone, writing his "manifesto" without talking to comrades or friends. He had not previously been involved in political efforts to change the American insurance system. He has entered a guilty plea to federal stalking charges resulting in death, without offering an extensive political defense (he still faces murder charges in a New York State case); at one point, his lawyers had considered arguing that he suffered an "extreme emotional disturbance." While he seems disconnected from any political mobilization, his act of violence has prompted a political response: the interpretation, which seems to be shared by many in the economic elite, that he was driven not by mental distress, but by the class divide.

The class-based violence of the past was part of a much bigger struggle. Today, the violence is the end in itself.

MR. BERKMAN'S ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT very likely awakened fear and guilt in Andrew Carnegie. He had been in Europe during the Homestead Strike, and he found it deeply upsetting: "Never employ one of these rioters," he wrote Mr. Frick. But even before Homestead, Carnegie had become persuaded that the extreme concentration of wealth would inevitably breed "social distrust." As he put it in an 1889 essay: "Each Caste is without sympathy with the other, and ready to credit anything disparaging in regard to it."

Carnegie believed that the answer to class rage was for the rich to invest their money in philanthropic projects so that the poor would become convinced that they were benevolent at heart, able to steward the resources of society. As he put it, "Even the poorest can be made to see . . . that great sums gathered by some of their fellow citizens and spent for public purposes . . . are more valuable to them than if scattered among them through the course of many years in trifling amounts." In other words, libraries, concert halls and universities over higher wages.

Whether Carnegie's efforts were successful at ameliorating the anger of working-class people is doubtful. What is striking in Carnegie is not so much the sense of social obligation as his recognition that the perceptions of poor people might matter for his own comfort and the stability of his society. That acknowledgment seems lacking today.

Instead, fear is causing the wealthy to invest in literal fortifications. Luxury home builders are incorporating a vast array of new security features into the mansions they construct, from safe rooms to retina scanners to guard towers and moats. Island communities like Indian Creek Island in Miami, also known as "Billionaire Bunker," reportedly draw ultrawealthy residents like Mark Zuckerberg and Jeff Bezos with the benefit of being effectively closed to the public. With one guarded bridge as the only way in or out, the island takes the idea of a gated community to a new level. There are Land Rovers remodeled for the frightened rich, augmented with pepper-spray guns, and dog breeders who specialize in canines designed to attack intruders.

But it is hard to imagine these measures doing anything other than making the paranoia of the wealthy worse. If anything, they create visual reminders of a deeply fragmented and divided society, physical testimony to the barriers that separate the haves and have-nots. Like the infamous "Wall of Shame" built in 1980s Lima, Peru, which separated a privileged gated community from an impoverished neighborhood, they are efforts to create security that wind up making fear manifest.

AMERICAN CLASS RELATIONS continued to be fiercely violent after World War I, as companies and the government worked together to break the labor movement. Hundreds of immigrant radicals faced deportation following a series of bombings, as the historian Beverly Gage has written, including one at the home of the United States attorney, general, A. Mitchell Palmer.

The class violence of the late 19th and early 20th centuries continued during the 1920s, in the mine wars of West Virginia, and the 1930s, when many corporations stockpiled gas equipment and guns to resist rebellion. Company security forces fired on unemployed workers at the Ford Motor Company in 1932 who were participating in a "hunger march." Police officers killed strikers on the San Francisco waterfront in 1934, sparking a general strike. In Chicago three years later, police officers shot and killed 10 pro-labor marchers in what came to be called the Memorial Day Massacre. Only days before, Ford security guards savagely beat up United Automobile Workers union leaders, including the union president, Walter Reuther, on camera — images that were carried in newspapers throughout the country.

But the growth of the labor movement over these years opened up new possibilities. The creation of independent institutions, like unions and consumer cooperatives, gave workers a say over their basic conditions on the job, to grant them more autonomy and more freedom. Such "countervailing powers," to quote the economist John Kenneth Galbraith, also mitigated the total power of employers and the wealthy. Henry Ford fought unions at his company bitterly, but when workers finally were able to vote on the question in a federally supervised election in 1941, 97 percent voted to unionize.

After World War II, regular increases in the minimum wage, the expansion of health insurance and pensions, tax policies that reduced extreme inequality and public investment in higher education all added up to an economy more responsive to the needs of working-class people. The political circumstances of these measures are distinct, but they generally grew out of the political organizing that had helped support the New Deal of the 1930s. They came to be with the help of New Deal Democrats who were responsive to the labor movement, which not only represented workers on the job, but brought their interests into political life.

IN SHORT, THE DISTANCE between the wealthy and the underclass became smaller, and the virulence between the classes did, too.

In the past 50 years, however, political leaders have vilified government programs, tried to break public sector strikes, starved the welfare state of funds and transformed the tax system so that it has tilted to favor the wealthy. Organizing a labor union has become far more difficult and a first contract much harder to win. We've seen precisely the hardening of the "castes" that Carnegie warned of long ago.

Societies in which there is an extreme division between the wealthiest and the rest tend to be politically unstable ones as well. They provide fertile ground for conspiracy theories to flourish, as people grapple with why they are struggling and why the mechanisms of democracy do not seem to respond to their needs. Inequality makes it virtually impossible to sustain the feeling that we're all part of the same political project, and so it makes it hard for people to believe that democratic government is possible — that we all have a common stake in society. Small numbers of people with great fortunes come to exercise disproportionate political power.

But highly unequal societies also become ones in which the very rich fear the rest of the world they live in. They cannot help but view the Uber drivers, the subcontracted warehouse employees and the people whose livelihoods are displaced by their technologies with suspicion.

They are not wrong to fear the anger of those dispossessed groups, and the dispossessed are not wrong to be angry. But what matters is how this class anger is expressed, whether it leads to nihilism or solidarity, to isolated rage or collective action. By so profoundly weakening many of the institutions that once nurtured collective action — labor unions, political organizations, protest groups — our society has made itself one in which people torch warehouses. What we need is a more viable path to a better world, or at least a more equal one.

KIM PHILLIPS-FEIN *is the author of "Country of Lords: Neo-Aristocrats, Social Darwinists, Tech Utopians and the Long Fight Against Equality in America."*

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This mother deserves mercy, not life in prison

Michelle Oberman

I've spent years writing about cases of mothers who kill their children, so when I heard about Lindsay Clancy's arrest in connection with the deaths of her three children, my hunch was that she was insane. As a legal scholar, I also knew she'd face an uphill battle to prove it.

On the day that Ms. Clancy killed her children in 2023, she built a snowman with her family and ordered takeout. While her husband was picking up dinner, she strangled her children, who were 5 years, 3 years and 8 months old, before jumping out of her home's second-story window.

She told a forensic psychologist that a voice ordered her to do it. Her lawyer has argued that she was suffering from postpartum psychosis, a condition driven in part by hormonal shifts after childbirth that can cause hallucinations, delusions and paranoia, along with heightened risks of suicide and infanticide. I am not a doctor and haven't met Ms. Clancy, but from everything I've read about the case, I believe this diagnosis is probably accurate.

Because the symptoms of postpartum psychosis wax and wane, mothers can seem to be coping when, in fact, they are drowning. This on-and-off psychosis also makes it difficult for women who kill their children to qualify for the insanity defense, which is often the only defense available to defendants in cases like Ms. Clancy's.

The question her jurors must answer is whether her illness rendered her unable to appreciate that it was wrong to kill or incapable of stopping herself from doing it. That framing means that in cases like this, prosecutors point to any signs of competence or control or even the fact that women are horrified by their actions to argue that they should not qualify for the insanity defense.

Cases like Ms. Clancy's are more common than we might want to believe. A 2020 KQED investigation found more than 100 women in California prisons for killing their children, a majority serving life sentences. Roughly 40 percent of those cases involved a child under the age of 1 — meaning the mother might have been in a period when women are at higher risk for postpartum mental illness.

I have reviewed many such cases and have met some of those women. Some will never recover their sanity — a blessing of sorts. Those who do recover feel overwhelming guilt and pain. During the medical examiner's description of the children's fatal injuries, Ms. Clancy began sobbing uncontrollably, moaning, "I can't do this." She was so distraught that the judge ordered a recess.

It seems clear to me, from the evidence presented so far, that Ms. Clancy should be acquitted by reason of insanity. She deserves mercy because she did something she never would have done if she hadn't been terribly ill. Even though we know that symptoms of postpartum psychosis can vary wildly from hour to hour, America's existing legal framework asks jurors to determine the defendant's exact state of mind at the moment of killing. This is an impossible task, especially in cases like Ms. Clancy's; she has said she doesn't fully remember her acts. Then we give jurors a stark choice, either full acquittal (for reasons of insanity) or conviction of first-degree murder (almost always with life imprisonment). Facing the horror of these killings, many juries opt to convict.

Laws in Britain, Canada and Australia are, on the whole, far more just and merciful than the life sentences so common in the U.S. for mothers who kill their children.

The standard formulation of the U.S. insanity defense dates back to the mid-19th century, when we understood so little about mental illness that expert witnesses sometimes still opined on defendants' criminal propensity by measuring their skulls. The so-called M'naghten rule originated in England after the 1843 acquittal of Daniel M'naghten, who killed the prime minister's secretary while suffering from an insane delusion.

SARAH PALMER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Responding to outcry against the not guilty verdict, the House of Lords, along with the common law judges of the time, established a test that largely limited the insanity defense to cases in which the defendant lacked the capacity to tell right from wrong. Under this stricter rubric, someone like M'naghten — who fired a gun with the intention to kill and whose behavior (concealing his guns, loitering near the area for weeks before the shooting and lying about why) indicated he might have known it was wrong — would not qualify as insane. Never mind that he was flagrantly out of touch with reality.

In a sense, Ms. Clancy is lucky, because Massachusetts is one of a handful of states that have updated their insanity defense. Four states don't allow it at all. Most U.S. states still follow the M'naghten rule, restricting insanity to cases in which defendants did not know their actions were wrong. By contrast, for more than 50 years, Massachusetts has held that defendants should not be judged criminally responsible if mental illness renders them unable to control their actions to follow the law.

Yet the entwining of lucidity and delusion in postpartum psychosis complicates the jury's task. To the outside observer, Ms. Clancy appeared functional, chatting at preschool pickups and taking care of her children. But the journal in which she wrote about her symptoms and medications tells of her frantic efforts to regain control over her mind. In the four months before the tragedy, she was prescribed 13 medications by different providers. She wrote about having "horrible thoughts" and made Google searches related to schizophrenia, hallucinations, psychosis, bipolar disorder and sociopathy.

In its opening statement, the prosecution pointed to Ms. Clancy's apparent competence, using it to suggest that there was no evidence of psychosis. Assistant District Attorney Shanan Buckingham argued that Ms. Clancy was acting "pretty normal" on the day of the killings and pointed to the fact that she had mapped out her husband's route, allowing her to determine how long she would have to commit the crime.

When the jurors in the trial start their deliberations, which could happen as soon as this week, they may well struggle with which version of events to believe. But the choices in cases like Ms. Clancy's needn't be so constrained.

Britain's Infanticide Act of 1938 recognizes that cases involving mothers who kill infants under the age of 1 are often different from other intentional killings. Instead of trying these women for murder and judging them under an insanity defense, it allows them to be charged with infanticide and to be punished as if convicted of manslaughter. Prison sentences are rare; usually the women are sentenced to probation and counseling. Other countries have similar laws, including Canada and parts of Australia.

It's not a perfect solution; surely some of the mothers should have been found not guilty for reasons of insanity. And perhaps some are even truly guilty of murder. Still, the result of the British law is, on the whole, far more just and merciful than the life sentences so common in the United States. And because these cases typically don't go to public trial, tragedies can avoid becoming true-crime dramas. America should follow Britain's example.

Once upon a time, a U.S. judge might have tempered the cruelty of a guilty verdict by exercising discretion at sentencing. Today many states, including Massachusetts, prohibit judicial discretion in sentencing in cases like these. If Ms. Clancy is convicted, her judge must sentence her to life without parole.

Ms. Clancy's trial, with its high-stakes drama and surrounding media frenzy, does little to honor her children. A just society punishes only the blameworthy. America's approach to insanity in these cases makes it harder, not easier, to do justice.

MICHELLE OBERMAN *is a professor at Santa Clara University School of Law and an author of "When Mothers Kill: Interviews From Prison" and "Mothers who Kill Their Children."*

Has World War III already started?

STEPHENS, FROM PAGE 1

That's the good news. There's far more by way of bad news.

First, as in the 1930s and '40s, the spheres of conflict have multiplied and are merging.

Russia's battlefield reversals seem to have done nothing to diminish Putin's appetite for risk as he expands his campaign, in barely concealed attacks and threats, against Moldova, Poland and Germany, among other states, while his political allies repeatedly call for direct strikes on Europe and the use of nuclear weapons against Ukraine. Hamas's assault on Israel in 2023 became, in stages, a war between Israel and Hezbollah, the Houthis and Iran; then a war between Iran, the United States and the Gulf states. More recently, Ukraine has directed long-range strikes in the Caspian Sea to disrupt Iranian military supplies to Russia. And decisions in one theater directly affect outcomes in the other: The expenditure of missile interceptors in the Middle East means that few can now be spared for Ukraine.

Second, the Axis of Authoritarians has become a fully operational military alliance.

DAVID GUTTENFELDER/THE NEW YORK TIMES

China supplies Russia with most of the electronic components used in its drones and other military hardware.

Russia is providing North Korea with help to modernize its armed forces, while the North has returned the favor by sending millions of artillery rounds and is now reportedly prepared to send thousands of additional troops to fight for Russia in Ukraine. China supplies Russia with most of the electronic components used in its drones and other military hardware. Russia has given Iran critical targeting intelligence to strike U.S. bases and ships in the Middle East. In the event of a Chinese attack on Taiwan, Beijing could call in its chips with Moscow by engaging the aid of Russia's powerful Pacific submarine fleet, as detailed in a new paper from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

Third, the West is a mess.

President Trump complains of the weakness of U.S. allies. Those allies complain of Trump's bullying, capriciousness, callowness, mendacity and incompetence. Both sides are right. The latest U.S. tariff salvo on Canada is a case in point: politically ill advised, economically self-defeating, strategically enervating.

Yet none of that erases the fact that Canada, a trade-dependent nation with the world's longest coastline, barely has a navy to speak of, or that its government's "new strategic partnership" with China is immoral, unwise and unsound — unless Mark Carney, the prime minister, really thinks that Trump's idiotic outbursts are a graver long-term threat to Canada and the free world writ large than the patient designs of the People's Republic.

THOMAS PETER/REUTERS

Smoke from missile and drone attacks in Kyiv, Ukraine, in June. Ukraine has directed long-range strikes in the Caspian Sea to disrupt Iranian military supplies to Russia.

Fourth, the United States is militarily unprepared.

The war against Iran revealed not just the munitions shortages, which helped bring the war to a premature close, but also America's acute sensitivity to military fatalities and economic pain, which gave Iran's leaders an asymmetric advantage given their own tolerance for human suffering. The war in Ukraine has demonstrated that even the most sophisticated U.S. military kit is entering obsolescence thanks to the advent of A.I.-assisted drone warfare. The tanks the States and its allies supplied Kyiv during the Biden administration "now mostly sit idle, hidden in forests and collecting cobwebs," as The Times reported this week.

Yet Pete Hegseth, America's testosterone-obsessed defense secretary, last week decided to phase out an Army drone unit, seemingly because it was championed by generals he didn't like. The travails of the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln during the carrier's long deployment are a national scandal. But they should call attention to the historically small size of the fleet and our depleted industrial base that struggles to build and maintain ships. Democrats blocking the defense appropriations bill aren't helping things, either.

Fifth, we may be near the economic brink.

One great difference between the 1930s and the present is that, unlike then, we are not in the midst of a worldwide depression. But the warning signs of a sharp and abrupt downturn are everywhere. What happens if or when the A.I. boom starts to run out of steam, much as the dot-com boom did at the beginning of the century? Or if the currency crisis in Japan causes it to start selling off its U.S. Treasury bonds? Stanley Druckenmiller, the legendary investor, recently warned in The Wall Street Journal that the Treasury Department's bond buybacks were all but destined to fail: Ultimately, the price of a $40 trillion national debt will be felt in sharply higher interest rates and the risks they pose to every sector of the economy that's depended for too long on cheap credit.

A deep U.S. recession, or a global financial panic, will inevitably worsen every trend mentioned above. In periods of economic distress, democracies almost always become more risk-averse, while dictatorships become risk-prone. That's a pattern of history worth recalling as we continue to drift, only dimly aware, toward the gathering storm.

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STYLE

GABRIELA HERMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A once-private part of a very popular island

Jackie Kennedy Onassis' secluded beach on Martha's Vineyard now is open to everyone. But getting there really takes some effort.

BY REMY TUMIN

Alex Wilcox Cheek's alarm went off a few minutes before 10 a.m. on a recent Sunday to reserve a parking space at a trailhead on the farthest tip of Martha's Vineyard, the exclusive island just south of Cape Cod in Massachusetts. The pressure, he said, was not unlike buying coveted concert tickets.

He would later spend a morning among the trees — oaks, beetlebungs (the island's name for black gum trees), maples — gnarled with time and salt spray from the Atlantic Ocean. He wondered, Had anyone ever seen these trees up close, in person?

It was a fair question. After generations of private ownership, more than 330 acres (140 hectares) in the small town of Aquinnah that once was owned by Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and her daughter, Caroline Kennedy, opened to the public last year as the Squibnocket Pond Reservation, with a new trail added in July.

The property includes windswept moors, burbling creeks and an exclusive swimming beach. It not only offers a prime example of how one of history's most famous families, back in the cultural discourse with TV shows such as "Love Story" and an unsuccessful run at Congress, has enjoyed the privacy of natural beauty. But it also cracks open a corner of Martha's Vineyard, so untouched that other multimillion-dollar properties — and the affordable housing crisis created in their wake — don't even seem to exist.

In 1978, Onassis purchased the property, known as Red Gate Farm, for $1.1 million. Kennedy and her husband, Edwin Schlossberg, sold the land in 2020 for $27 million to two of the largest land conservation groups on the island, the Martha's Vineyard Land Bank and the Sheriff's Meadow Foundation. (The property was once listed at $65 million.)

MARK ALAN LOVEWELL/VINEYARD GAZETTE

The reserve includes two separate holdings. The north entrance is a woodland walk, and the south entrance has multiple trails. They include some that lead to a half-mile-long (800-meter) beach and, new this summer, a trail that skirts Squibnocket Pond. There, visitors can peer into an old hunting cabin where the former first lady once hosted lunches.

Next year, the land groups hope to make kayaks available to take onto the pond.

But getting there isn't for the faint of heart. Parking spaces with access to the south entrance are limited to 10 spots a day in the summer and require online reservations. Cellphone service is sparse. Ticks are ever present. And it is about a 25-minute walk down to the ocean.

"Our goal from the very outset was to site the trailhead far away so that you had to walk to get there," said James Lengyel, the executive director of the Land Bank. "And when you got there you would be rewarded by the remoteness and your ability to enjoy nature pretty much by yourself."

JACKIE'S SANCTUARY

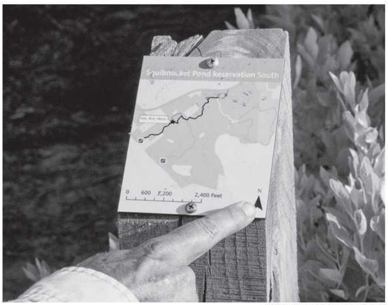
In the late 1970s, Onassis told her children that "she had fallen in love with the rolling hills, wild dunes and silent ponds of Aquinnah," Kennedy wrote in a letter to The Vineyard Gazette in 2019. "My mother believed that a North Atlantic summer was one of the most magical gifts in life."

Red Gate Farm, named for the gate that originally stood at the front of the property, "provided her with the sanctuary she needed and the freedom to be close to nature, her family, her friends and her books," her daughter wrote. "It was a perfect expression of her romantic and adventurous spirit."

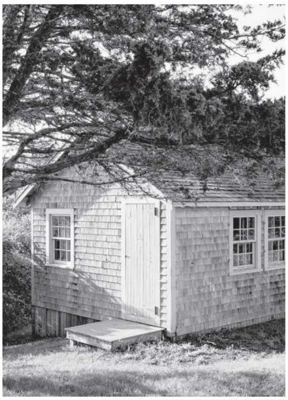
Onassis was largely welcomed in town, both for her efforts in preserving the land and for living the Vineyard way: biking to the Gay Head Lighthouse, paddling in her kayak, checking her lobster pots, grabbing ice cream with her grandchildren and keeping a low profile.

The bulk of the property sale — 304 acres for $27 million — took place in December 2020. A year later, the Land Bank paid $10 million for an additional 32-acre lot from the family. (Caroline Kennedy declined an interview for this story.)

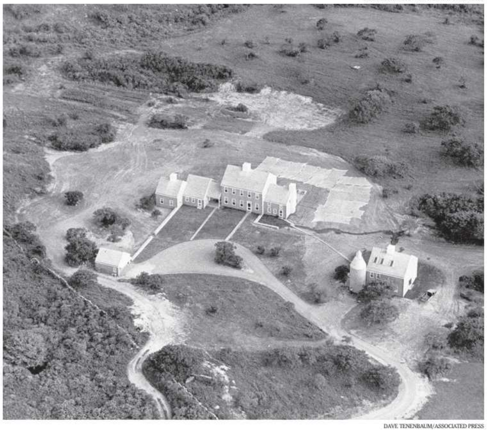
Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, shown at left in a photo taken on Martha's Vineyard in 1993, bought Red Gate Farm on the Massachusetts island in 1978. More than 300 acres of the property, sold to conservation groups, was opened to the public last year. They include access to the water, top, hiking trails and, far right, a hunting cabin where Onassis held lunches.



GABRIELA HERMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



GABRIELA HERMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



DAVE TENENBAUM/ASSOCIATED PRESS

An aerial view, left, of Onassis' home in 1981. Below, her son and daughter-in-law, John F. Kennedy Jr. and Carolyn Bessette Kennedy, were photographed there in 1997.

SHUTTERSTOCK

The Kennedy-Schlossberg family kept the traditional Cape Cod-style house, guesthouse and surrounding 95 acres. But if you're hoping to get a glimpse of the Kennedy compound or run into Kennedy's son, Jack Schlossberg, on the beach, you will be out of luck. The preserve was purposely sited to maintain the family's privacy.

Still, this land is steeped in Kennedy memories: John F. Kennedy Jr. could be seen windsurfing down on Squibnocket Pond in the 1990s, before he died in a plane crash not far from the family's home. Tatiana Schlossberg, Caroline Kennedy's daughter who died in January, was married at the family's home in 2017. Many islanders can recall taking walks along the Atlantic beach, only to be turned around by an armed guard when the family was in residence.

THE LAND AND THE LORE

Living year-round in a community where the economy relies largely on summer visitors has always been a difficult dance, none more so than in the last decade, as soaring housing prices have trickled down to every facet of island life. But long before the concept of vacationland or a summer White House ever emerged, this land was — and remains — inhabited by the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah).

The Wampanoag have lived on the island, which they know as Noepe, for thousands of years, with a tribal community anchored in Aquinnah. The new reserve includes many sites such as Black Brook and Witch Pond that are rooted in Wampanoag mythology.

Tribal leaders said they were not contacted by the Kennedy-Schlossberg family ahead of the sale and would have tried to find a way to bring the ancestral land back into their ownership or stewardship.

"Whether we purchase it or not, we should be considered," Kevin Devine, the chairman of the tribe, said in an interview.

Tribal members do have special access rights to the land for sustenance purposes, including hunting and foraging.

> **"It was a perfect expression of her romantic and adventurous spirit."**

In 2006, the Kennedy-Schlossberg family made a $100,000 donation to the town's affordable housing committee as part of a new subdivision plan. For the Land Bank and Sheriff's Meadow Foundation, that donation satisfied consideration of any further affordable housing needs on the property.

"When you look at the coast from Boston down to Washington, there's very little that is natural," Lengyel said. "So when you have an opportunity to protect something natural within those poles, you don't trifle it away. You've gotta pay attention."

But Juli Vanderhoop, the chairman of Aquinnah Board of Selectmen and a tribal member, said the affordable housing crisis facing the island, one that has forced many local families to move off-island, was too critical to ignore. Vanderhoop said she would have liked to see some of the property include housing and for the tribe to have overseen the land, as a way to support people who call Aquinnah home.

"What's the responsibility of the conservation society to give back to the communities that hold these special places?" she said. "Really, I mean, because we're losing them."

Vanderhoop, who also owns Orange Peel Bakery in town, knows the magic of this corner of the island well.

There are more than 30 rare species on the property, including spotted turtles, orchids and shorebirds. Adam Moore, the president of the Sheriff's Meadow Foundation, admired one of the oak trees on a recent morning and noted the different trunks sprouting from the stump.

"That's one tree that was probably cut at one time," he said. "That's why it has one, two, three — no four — major trunks."

Moore continued beyond the sea lavender and patches of poison ivy, crossing over raised boardwalks that zigzagged across windswept dunes. The ocean was at first a sliver on the horizon and then unfurled without another person in sight.

Be careful of getting lost in the beauty on the boardwalks, he cautioned. "I've almost fallen off this because I start looking out," he said.

A seal bobbed its head up to say hello, as terns skated across the water's edge. The state of the beach is in the hands of the tides — sometimes it is sandy, sometimes it is rocky. But one thing is for sure, Moore said, "It's a knockout beautiful beach."

Sports

When tennis stars made the extraordinary routine

Analysis

BY MATTHEW FUTTERMAN
THE ATHLETIC

JAMES HILL FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Above, from left, Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic dominated men's tennis for 20 years, while Serena Williams did the same in the women's game. Below from left: Jannik Sinner, Aryna Sabalenka and Carlos Alcaraz are among today's best players, but it is unlikely that they will ever be able to match the previous generation's mastery.

CAMERON SPENCER/GETTY IMAGES

KEITO NEWMAN/THE CANADIAN PRESS, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

VALERY HACHE/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

Aryna Sabalenka, the top-ranked women's player in the world and the two-time defending U.S. Open champion, was at a round table with a handful of journalists when someone asked her about the glut of power at the top of the women's game, mentioning Sabalenka, Coco Gauff and Iga Swiatek.

Sabalenka cut them off right there and reminded them that they had forgotten Elena Rybakina, the world No. 2 and, in her view, maybe the best player in the world this season. Sabalenka, 28, who has been the dominant player on the WTA the past two years, recognized that she was in the middle of her most mortal stretch of form in that time.

Since winning the Sunshine Double in Indian Wells and Miami, Sabalenka has made one semifinal in seven tournaments. But just as Rybakina, the Australian Open champion, seemed poised to overtake Sabalenka at the top of the world rankings, she aggravated an Achilles injury and retired against Swiatek in the Cincinnati Open quarterfinals. She then pulled out of the mixed doubles tournament of the U.S. Open.

Earlier this year, after succumbing to a combination of cramps, heat exhaustion and illness in the second round of the French Open in Paris, the men's world No. 1 Jannik Sinner, who had been on a 30-match winning streak that included five ATP Masters 1000 titles, hit on a theme that ties into all this.

"We're not robots," he said.

Carlos Alcaraz, Sinner's great rival at the top of the sport, had not even made it to Paris to defend his title. He had already missed more than a month with a right wrist injury by then, and he will return at the U.S. Open having missed three months more. The crucible of five-set tennis and the shaking off of plenty of rust await as he tries to defend his singles title.

Given how his season has gone, it is fitting that Alcaraz, 23, had already signaled the precariousness of his seemingly inevitable success, which has looked mostly effortless during his wildly impressive six-year career.

"We're touching wood and praying that nothing's going to happen to my body," Alcaraz had said at the Monte Carlo Masters, when asked whether he intended to skip any clay-court tournaments after losing to Sinner in the final.

"I don't know how it's going to be, the matches, if I'm going to win matches, if I'm going to lose in the first rounds, if the matches are going to be super-demanding physically or not. So I don't know how it's going to be, but what I can tell right now is I will hear my body much better this year than last year."

A few days later, he would hear it a little too loudly. He felt a shooting pain in his wrist during his opening match at the Barcelona Open. Scans showed he was dealing with tenosynovitis, an injury in which fluid accumulates in the sheath that protects a key tendon in the wrist.

He made his comeback on Tuesday in the U.S. Open mixed doubles, where he partnered with Serena Williams. They lost to Belinda Bencic and Flavio Cobolli in the quarterfinals.

Sinner, who has just turned 25, was not there. He is out with a knee injury that has prevented him from playing since Wimbledon.

After losses at the Canadian and Cincinnati Opens, Sabalenka played the mixed doubles with Novak Djokovic, with an aim of regaining confidence in time for the singles. They lost in the first round.

At this point, the hope is that Sabalenka's affinity for New York and the U.S. Open, which she has won the past two years, will help her rediscover the prowess that made her nearly invincible earlier in the season and at times last year.

Swiatek, who has six majors at 25 and is so far the greatest player of her generation, is coming out of a long and challenging journey, marked by early exits and difficult losses, to rediscover the controlled aggressiveness that defines her best tennis. She is starting to surge. Sabalenka, whose dominance came later in her career after struggles with her serve and baseline control, is trying to find her juice again.

This isn't the script anyone had written for Alcaraz, Sinner and Sabalenka early in the year. That's probably far more the fault of the would-be tennis script writers than this trio. Those three have combined for 16 Grand Slam titles and five year-end No. 1 finishes since 2022.

It's a level of success that had plenty of tennis observers believing that history was about to repeat itself. For 20 years, Roger Federer, Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal and Serena Williams lulled the tennis faithful into thinking that dominance on a historic level was normal. Those four combined for 89 Grand Slam singles titles. Djokovic may yet make it an even 90.

That is not normal. That's ridiculous.

Even more ridiculous, Federer played 1,545 matches during his career. He did not retire from a single one. Of all his records, that is probably the one that will never be broken. Nadal missed a good few majors in his prime because of a cavalcade of physical issues, but Djokovic did not miss one until he was 30, and Federer's absences came at the end of his career.

What's happening now is much more normal, as Sinner and Alcaraz manage injuries and sometimes miss Grand Slams, and Sabalenka, Swiatek and Gauff go for long stretches without titles and have to reconfigure their tennis along the way.

It has been a little hard to remember that, given the past two decades.

In everyone's defense, Sinner and Alcaraz did spend 2024 and 2025 making everyone believe that a decade of duopoly was at hand. They split eight consecutive Grand Slams.

Sinner's absence from the Open, the questions about how far Alcaraz can go in this tournament and Sabalenka's doldrums should serve as a healthy reminder of how rare the dominance of the previous generation was, and how hard it will be to match.

Alcaraz has made it clear what his career goal is. He wants to be the greatest player in the sport's history. Sabalenka, who is already 28 and has won "just" four Grand Slam titles, has already had a Hall of Fame career.

As for Sinner, missing this tournament will burn. But he knows it's with good reason. He wants a long career and to be as good as he possibly can be, whatever that means.

Like Sabalenka, he followed a devastating loss in Australia by sweeping the Sunshine Double and going on that springtime tear. He righted Paris by winning Wimbledon, his monstrous serve propelling him through a shaky period in his baseline game. Then, after tests in Italy last month and this month, he pulled out of Canada, Cincinnati and then New York.

He is not a robot. None of them are, and never will be. Even the greatest of the greats were not. They just made it really hard to remember that.

The Mini Crossword

1	2	3	■	■
4			5	6
7				
8				
■	■	9		

8/27/2026 BY JOEL FAGLIANO

ACROSS

1 A watched one never boils, it's said
4 "See ya later!"
7 Sea ___, animal that builds the conch shell
8 Airplane seating choice
9 James Talarico's state: Abbr.

DOWN

1 Leaning Tower city
2 All: Prefix
3 In the morning, a food; in the evening, a speech
5 Something that can be AirDropped
6 Show off, as muscles

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

■	T	I	N	■
D	O	N	U	T
O	U	T	R	O
C	R	E	S	T
■	■	L	E	O

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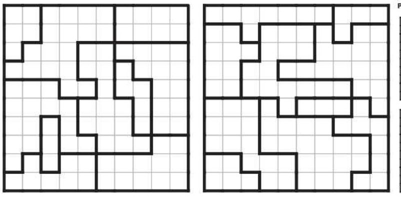
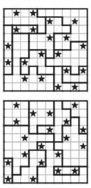
Two Not Touch



ANSWERS TO PREVIOUS PUZZLES



Put two stars in each row, column and region of the grid. No two stars may touch, not even diagonally.

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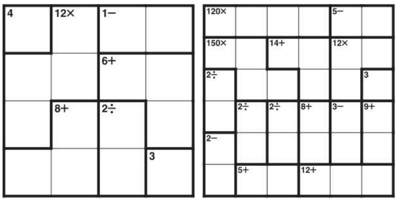
Cryptogram

NOJC MPNLNYCU EA E BTRRH UTWCAYTQC ETU, MCMAT WCYA TYA OELC BPNL YGC AYNLEJG CORHLC MCMATO.

PUZZLE BY BEN BASS

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER Ohio, Orinoco (or Okavango)

KenKen



ANSWERS TO PREVIOUS PUZZLES

1	3	4	2
3	2	1	4
2	4	3	1
4	1	2	3

6	1	4	5	3	2
1	3	5	2	4	6
3	4	1	6	2	5
2	5	6	4	1	3
5	2	3	1	6	4
4	6	2	3	5	1

Fill the grid with digits so as not to repeat a digit in any row or column, and so that the digits within each heavily outlined box will produce the target number shown, by using addition, subtraction, multiplication or division, as indicated in the box. A 4x4 grid will use the digits 1-4. A 6x6 grid will use 1-6.

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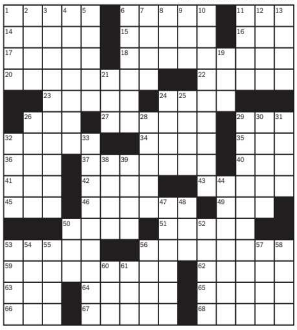
Crossword | Edited by Will Shortz

PUZZLE BY ZACHARY DAVID LEVY



8/27/26

ACROSS

1 Open with one's teeth?
6 Network that launched in 1994 with the film "Scent of a Woman"
11 Bed threads
14 Pre-Inca civilization known for its underground aqueducts and geoglyphs
15 November birthstone
16 CNBC subj.
17 Currently being tried
18 Apt synonym for "wake-up call"
20 Seattle pro soccer team
22 Look at this!
23 Make a right turn?
24 Greek organization, informally
26 4x platinum self-titled album of 2001
27 More saplike
29 "Sesame Street" character with a pet rock named Rocco
32 Alertness aid
34 Founder of Stoicism
35 Go the other way
36 Not just my
37 Loaded with energy
40 When doubled, first name in classic Hollywood
41 ___ Khamenei, former supreme leader of Iran
42 Daughter of Saturn, in Roman myth
43 Just sat around
45 One sitting on a coop board?
46 Colombian offerings that may be served with hogao
49 Conditions
50 "___ counting?"
51 Check-in from a texter
53 Discombobulated
56 Large storage unit
59 Be a rat
62 2007 horror sequel
63 "The Simpsons" character ___ Nahasapeemapetilon
64 Monotonous hum
65 Hat decoration in a marching band
66 Relay division
67 Word before park or after cheap
68 Less candid, perhaps

DOWN

1 Some, in León
2 Allied grp.
3 Astronaut for whom a Pixar character is named
4 "You're not the only one!"
5 Longtime "Saturday Night Live" announcer Don
6 Start to type?
7 Action figures and such
8 Parrot
9 Indian P.M., 1991-96
10 Totino's frozen food offering
11 Tropical fruta
12 Pic file format
13 Put out
19 911 responder
21 "Music for Airports" composer
24 Feudal estate
25 Lens solution brand
26 10,000,000 ergs
28 2004 inductees into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame ... and a hint to 3-, 10-, 29- and 33-Down
29 Bear of children's rhyme
30 Desert havens
31 "Heavens to Murgatroyd!"
32 Biblical "captain"
33 Gesture also known as "spirit fingers"
38 French bread?
39 Console for Chrono Trigger, in brief
44 Completely missed shot
47 "It makes sense now!"
48 Soak
50 Microscopic
52 Insects responsible for virtually all fig pollination
53 Obsessively oriented
54 Record, in a way
55 A little too pleased with oneself
56 Bloke
57 "The devourer of all things," per Ovid
58 Perpetually
60 Clumsy vessel
61 Bygone cousin of a kiwi

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

R	A	G	E	■	M	A	G	M	A	■	M	O	P	E
A	H	E	M	■	A	T	L	A	S	■	A	V	O	N
B	E	A	U	T	Y	M	A	R	K	■	R	E	N	D
B	A	R	■	R	A	F	A	■	■	W	A	R	Y	■
I	D	S	A	Y	■	E	D	U	M	A	C	A	T	E
■	■	■	N	O	S	E	■	C	A	R	A	C	A	S
■	■	M	A	U	I	■	A	L	T	■	■	T	I	P
■	S	A	L	T	E	D	C	A	R	A	M	E	L	■
H	A	N	■	■	S	E	E	■	O	V	I	D	■	■
M	R	S	L	A	T	E	■	C	N	E	T	■	■	■
M	A	C	A	D	A	M	I	A	■	R	E	A	M	S
■	J	A	B	S	■	■	A	M	O	S	■	P	E	W
R	E	P	O	■	S	O	M	E	P	E	O	P	L	E
E	V	E	R	■	A	R	B	O	R	■	F	L	E	A
P	O	D	S	■	M	E	S	S	Y	■	F	E	E	T

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Culture

Divine and abundant. Extravagant, too.

A merger of technology and culture propels a show of Indian religious works

BY WILL HEINRICH

You don't need be a believer to find God at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Of course the museum teems with epiphanies from all over the world. But not one is more colorful or more evocative, none better captures the mystical paradox of unity in variety, than the extravagant chromolithograph prints in "Household Gods: Hindu Devotional Prints, 1860-1930."

Part of an explosion of photography and new printing technologies in the subcontinent, these images were made using a multistone process, developed in Europe by the 1830s, that printed each color separately, and were chiefly destined to enrich altars in private homes. But they read as thrilling aesthetic innovations just as fully as they do as religious artifacts.

Part of the feeling of oversaturation they offer comes simply from their unique intersection of cultures and technologies. India has been exchanging goods and influences with the Western world more or less forever, as the exquisite Grecian Buddhas of ancient Gandhara remind you.

But the late 19th century, the peak of the British Raj, quickened the pace. (In keeping with this effect of oversaturation, the museum is showing the prints in four rotations, and some of these may have been replaced by others by the time you visit.)

The South Indian nobleman Raja Ravi Varma, the most famous artist in the show, had some training in European oil painting. When he wanted to make his devotional images of figures from Hindu mythology more widely available, he turned to the recently imported new techniques, founded his own press and didn't hesitate to use every visual technique at hand. Presses in Germany and England, meanwhile, got busy turning out their own divine images for export.

But if there's something otherworldly about seeing Lord Vishnu, or Yama, the god of death, with exactly the sort of bristling halo of light that Albrecht Dürer would have used in a woodcut of the Madonna, the staggeringly vast narrative and visual iconography that Varma and other artists had behind them could easily absorb such little additions.

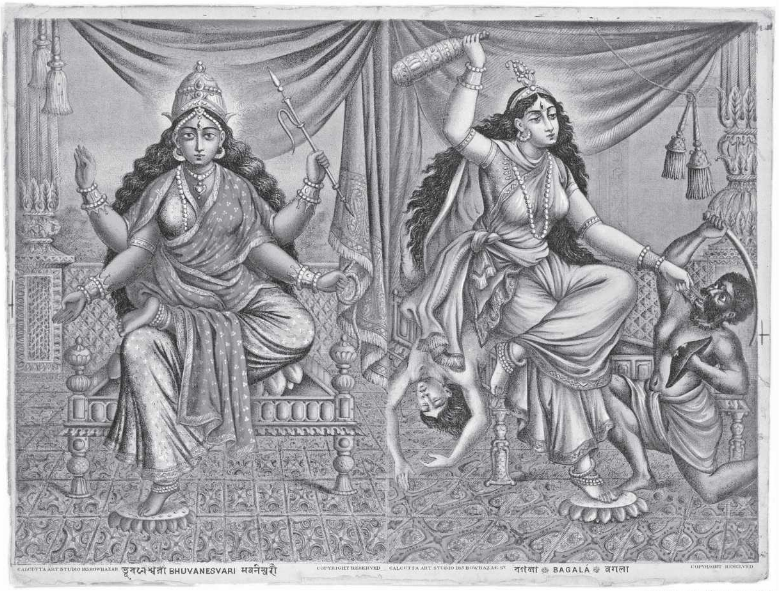
It makes sense that a deity like Vishnu, who is believed to preserve the whole cosmos, should take in every form possible. So what those ostensibly incongruous Western notes really do is amplify the richness of the material.

The same goes for the technology. The profusion of images of gods and heroes that lithography suddenly made possible in India feels paradoxically natural — weren't the gods already everywhere?

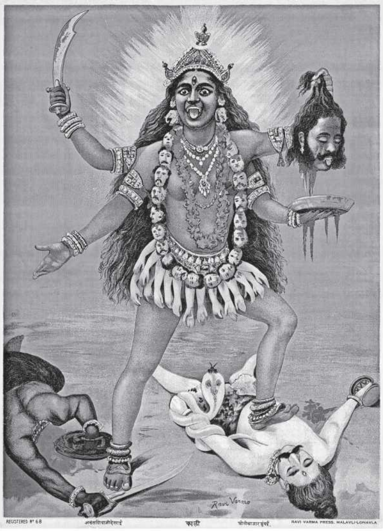
Lord Vishnu, the god of death, has exactly the sort of bristling halo of light as a Dürer woodcut of the Madonna.

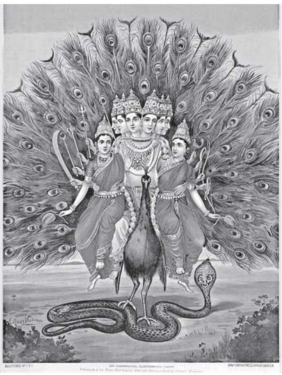
All that said, what really makes these prints so fabulous is their sheer aesthetic abundance — their density of color, composition, iconography and ornament, and their extraordinary stylistic range. Reclining on the divine serpent Shesha, in an 1886 print from the Chitraprakash Press in Mumbai (formerly Bombay), Vishnu leans and turns toward his courtier Narada, the subtly sinuous bend of his body echoing the rippling snake beneath him, even as the snake both echoes and evokes the waves.

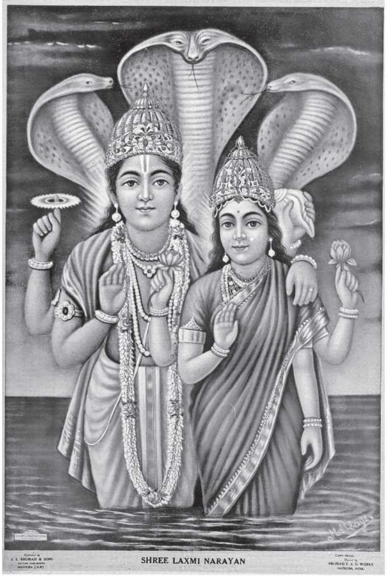
Around them are Vishnu's consort, Lakshmi, goddess of good fortune, monkey-headed Hanuman, horse-headed Hayagriva, embodiment of knowledge, and his steed Garuda in human form. In one of Vishnu's four hands he holds the stem of the lotus from which the creator god Brahma is born.



PHOTOGRAPHS VIA METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART







Above, a chromolithograph from the Calcutta Art Studio in West Bengal that depicts, from left, the goddesses Bhuvanesvari and Bagala. From far left, Kali, the wrathful protector; Subramanian and his consorts Mahavalli and Devasena; and the deities Vishnu and Lakshmi, by the artist M. Abbayi.

It sounds like too much. But the print's brilliant composition, in combination with its delicate use of color, holds everything neatly in place.

A World War II-era print, here in an edition from Uttar Pradesh by S.S. Brijbasi & Sons and F.A.O. Works, on the other hand, depicts a simple god, human-scale and accessible. Standing in front of the divine serpent with the waters of the cosmic ocean up to their knees, Vishnu and Lakshmi look as if they're on holiday, posing for a family photo.

Lord Vishnu was the exhibit's dominant figure when I first visited, followed closely by Shiva, compelling as "Lord of the Universe in Benares" in a monochrome lithograph from Kolkata (formerly Calcutta).

But the most visually arresting figure was probably Shiva's consort, the goddess Kali, an embodiment of life energy whose symbolism tends to the extreme and violent. In a chromolithograph with added watercolor, she wears a necklace of severed heads and a skirt of arms as she sticks out her tongue, brandishes a bloody sword and steps on Shiva's chest. At the same time, the way her blue-black color, with its accents of blood red, stands out against the ghostly background is magnetically beautiful.

Bad storm coming? To him that's good.

DOCUMENTARY LENS

Reed Timmer and others who get a rush from dicey skies are captured at work

BY ALISSA WILKINSON

There's no denying that Reed Timmer, the main tornado-chasing subject of the new documentary **"Never Stop Chasing"** (in theaters), runs on pure adrenaline. He drives at top speed toward the most dangerous storms, filming with his phone, hollering and whooping. And his buddies in the field acknowledge that even now, in his mid-40s, he seems to be trying to outrun the clock: "He can't take time off," one says. "He's just going to do whatever it takes to keep pushing forward."

Pushing forward, in this case, means pursuing extreme weather across Middle America, filming tornadoes and broadcasting the footage. For Timmer and his crew, it also means studying the phenomena, advocating for preparedness measures and, sometimes, helping with search and rescue after a storm whips through a community, wreaking havoc on people's lives.

Timmer has been at this since college in the late 1990s. Eventually he and his crew were highlighted in the Discovery reality show "Storm Chasers." They named themselves Team Dominator, after the armored car they drive. (Timmer was an inspiration for Glen Powell's character in the 2024 film "Twisters" and brought the screenwriter Mark L. Smith along on a chase.)

The director Ken Cole structures "Never Stop Chasing" partly as a profile of Timmer and Team Dominator, partly as just an extended look at some truly wild footage. The profile is more factual than insightful; the most intriguing peek into Timmer's psychology comes from his mother, who notes that her son was very afraid of thunderstorms when he was a toddler, but the "fear became a fascination once he started to learn about" extreme weather.

ABRAMORAMA

Reed Timmer on the trail of a storm in "Never Stop Chasing," directed by Ken Cole. The film includes several chases.

Still most of us neither chase storms nor want to, and there's not much here to illuminate what's going on in the heads of people obsessed with something so dangerous.

Around the halfway mark, though, the film transitions from filling in Timmer's back story to letting us ride along on several chases. (At one point, a photojournalist for The New York Times Magazine hitches a ride in the back seat of the Dominator for a 2024 piece.) And you start to understand: There's a strange, terrifying beauty to these funnels, which the team has to hold in balance with the destruction they wreak.

Connor McCrorey, who has been riding with Team Dominator since he was a teenager, recounts through tears his experience finding a 5-year-old girl in the aftermath of a 2014 Nebraska tornado and holding her hand as she died: "The dark side of what we do, it comes with the territory, and I'm really good at compartmentalizing," he says.

There's one more layer to the documentary that's unexpectedly reminiscent of the latest installment in the "Jackass" series. While the team's research can help save lives, tornado chasing is also obviously, by most measures, foolhardy. Some of the men have been hunting storms together since they were in their 20s, so they're not just obsessives but also close friends. They've stared death in the face over the years while developing a shorthand with one another. You might say the most beautiful part of the movie doesn't really have to do with storms at all. It's watching a crew of men who grew up together doing something crazy, obviously enjoying being together and caring for one another, waiting for the next storm to develop.

From ‘The Real World’ to the deal world

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

A U.S. Cabinet member takes his family on a trip that's wholesome but dull

BY JAMES PONIEWOZIK

PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE GREAT AMERICAN ROAD TRIP, VIA YOUTUBE

“The Great American Road Trip” follows Sean Duffy, the U.S. transportation secretary, and his family as they tour America and visit sponsors like Waymo, left.

There is a convention, when someone launches a spinoff of a hit TV show, of having the star of the original appear in the pilot to give it a boost. As it is in Hollywood, so it is in Washington.

Thus the first episode of “The Great American Road Trip” — the family-reality-show-meets-sponsor-showcase-meets-political-branding-exercise starring the secretary of transportation, Sean Duffy — includes an Oval Office cameo from President Trump. The former “Apprentice” host, in effusive M.C. mode, grants his blessing to the legacyquel, as Duffy and his family begin a six-episode tour.

It's a fitting project for an administration in which camera-readiness is a chief qualification. And it's a fitting assignment for Duffy and his wife, the Fox News host Rachel Campos-Duffy, both 1990s alums of “The Real World,” the MTV fishbowl series about “what happens when people stop being polite and start getting real.”

Having a video brand is now part of politics. Years ago, the former Alaska governor and vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin shot “Sarah Palin's Alaska” and “Amazing America.” Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has started a YouTube cooking show on which he touts nutritional yeast as “great for your microbiome.” On the Democratic side, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez posted an Instagram series about freezing her eggs, a personal testimonial that doubles as a political statement about reproductive choice and health care costs.

“Road Trip” was announced this spring, to a hail of controversy over its sponsorship by a host of companies that the Transportation Department regulates. It was meant to come out in June, ostensibly to inspire Americans to travel the country before the semiquincentennial on July 4. Now it has landed on YouTube as a belated 250th birthday gift, held up, Duffy recently said, for “extra editing” to comply with government ethics rules.

One can only imagine what sponcon landed on the cutting room floor. What remains still includes hero shots of a succession of gleaming Toyota S.U.V.s (the company is one of the patrons), as well as lengthy “work visits” by Duffy that plug sponsors Boeing, CRH and Waymo. (For the last, Duffy takes his children in a driverless car and says it will “have a huge impact on saving lives on American roads.”)

This is what happens when people stop being contrite and start cutting deals. A disclaimer at the opening of each episode says “Road Trip” was paid for “through the generous support of sponsors” and “accepted as a gift by the Department.”

Scrape off the thick coating of advertorial, and “Road Trip” is a mash-up of familiar cable reality genres: the travel show and the big-family reality show. The Duffys have nine children, and they've held out the size of their brood as a natalist political statement.

Several of the kids get subplots: the pregnancy of the eldest daughter, Evita; the college search of teenage Paloma; the experience of raising Valentina, 6, who has Down syndrome. The children, arguably, have the most important job here, helping Duffy rebrand himself as a patient, chuckling Everydad and injecting comic relief. One child describes the 1990s aesthetic of Duffy's “Real World” season as “like somebody vomited a rainbow.”

Donald Trump, in effusive M.C. mode, grants his blessing to the legacyquel, as Sean Duffy and his family begin a six-episode tour.

The reality-family genre is often conservative-religious-coded (think “19 Kids and Counting” or “Duck Dynasty”). “Road Trip” makes the Duffys' Catholic faith prominent — prayers at dinner, at bedtime, before big decisions — and there's a trad-family thread throughout. When Duffy visits his daughter Lucia at college and asks her what she's “in search of,” one of her friends guesses, “A husband!”

The vibe is competently basic-cable. Any TLC viewer will recognize the beats, the gentle bickering and the generic good-time music cues as the adventure sites move from Philadelphia to Charleston, S.C., to Route 66. (There is generous praise of the national parks, where the Trump administration has made deep cuts.)

But “Road Trip” is mostly about watching a Cabinet member Kardashianize his family while vacationing on the corporate dime, as the price of gas and nearly everything else has skyrocketed. There are guided tours of the Grand Canyon, a skiing detour at Jackson Hole, Wyo., V.I.P. treatment at Yellowstone, stays at gorgeous hotels and a Texas ranch.

It must be nice! And it's all very wholesome. But it's a snooze.

There's a more interesting series trying to get out here, about life in a political family with conservative-media-star parents whose reality-TV careers are literally the reason the kids were born. (Duffy and Campos-Duffy met on the “Real World” sister show “Road Rules.”) And for one episode, “Road Trip” is almost that show.

In the second installment, the family drives to Boston, where Sean revisits the converted firehouse from his season of “Real World,” in which he was cast as the rowdy young conservative. (There's a brief reunion with his feminist housemate from the season, Montana McGlynn.)

Duffy's past as a cast member in a show about coexistence soon collides with his present as a partisan figure. Paloma is touring colleges — including Harvard, one of the institutions the administration has assailed with lawsuits and funding cuts. He tells Paloma that he's not sure he'd let her attend the school, for fear it would change her values: “They have professionalized figuring out how they can take good young girls like you and, I think, corrupt their minds.” Later, Campos-Duffy says that her job is to get her children into heaven, not Harvard.

It's a glimpse of a reality show with history, generation gaps and actual conflict — what you might have made if the imperative were not to polish the people, locations and companies involved to a dealer-showroom sheen. Instead, we get a soft-focus family album with a faint whiff of advertising.

But what, or who, is being pitched? Toyota and Boeing? The Trump administration? Duffy himself, who might have other political destinations on his mental road map? (For that matter, there's his son-in-law, Michael Alfonso, who's running for Congress and is portrayed on the show as a doting expectant dad.)

On the one hand, the show makes Duffy's Cabinet job seem mostly like a series of fun junkets to glad-hand the companies he regulates. On the other, it does show that he and Campos-Duffy are still eminently comfortable in front of a camera, knowing how to give it just the quips, flirtations and sparring it wants. In this administration, making effective content is Job 1.

Duffy's return to reality TV may have limited reach; a day after its release, some episodes had fewer than a thousand views on YouTube. And it may have come a little late to spur families to pack up the car and see America this summer. But it does suggest that the road to the political future is increasingly lined with cameras — preferably your own.

Dystopia with a dopamine hit

BOOK REVIEW

The Breakup
By Kurt Andersen. *Random House.*
556 pp. $30.

BY JONATHAN DEE

FÉLIX DECOMBAT

Novels set in the future aren't exclusively the province of science fiction; anxious times tend to generate anxious, cautionary literary dystopias, and when was the last time you can remember not feeling anxious? The 20th century in particular abounded in such visions, some of which — “The Handmaid's Tale,” or “Brave New World,” published in 1932 and getting spookier every day — have proved more prophetic than others. They're best understood, though, not as genuine bets on our future, but as dreamlike unleashings of present-day fear over the blind volatility of the moment.

Kurt Andersen, in his new novel, “The Breakup,” does something few such books do (Jon Raymond's excellent 2022 climate-disaster novel, “Denial,” comes to mind); he sets his stage not in some distant century when our own problems are the stuff of history, but 19 years from now, when most of his readers are still likely to be around.

In an effort to game out the frightening liminality of American life in 2026, he depicts a 2045 in which — some years after a short, dirty, rather brilliantly imagined second American civil war — the country has fractured into two sloppily distinct but still official entities: the United States of America (now down to 39 states) and the Free American Republic, a largely white and Christian throwback to certain retrograde ideals with which we are all, here in the present, glumly familiar.

With peacetime established, the entirety of the former United States is allowed to vote on which of these two entities they want to join. Thus there is, this time around, nothing so geographically and imaginatively neat as a Mason-Dixon line; travelers through Southern states, for instance — where urban areas don't want to be part of the F.A.R. any more than the F.A.R. wants them — are crossing and recrossing “national” boundaries all the time. Not secession, but “disunion”: As solutions, go, it's a mess, but at least it's halted the terrorist drone attacks and the Army's responsive deployment of robots to kill rebellious American citizens in the streets. For now.

Our docents through this new American life are a family called the Zimbalists, whose own lines of fracture mirror the nation's, as they are very much aware. In 2044, the family moved from Tennessee to San Francisco so that Asher Zimbalist could take a job running a hazily defined “Institute” on behalf of a person who may be that most elusive of species, the altruistic billionaire. But Asher's wife, Natalie, couldn't bear the culture shock. She's a poet, of all things, though one who has earned some cultural infamy as a sort of plainspoken, Lionel Shriver-coded abuser of liberal pieties; six months ago, she moved back to Tennessee.

So have they broken up for good? Is politics to blame? They themselves aren't sure (nor are their two children), and now their hand is forced by the imminence of a long-planned tour of prospective colleges for their younger child, Logan. This tour will take them through the newly reconfigured heartland of America.

It's a good setup. What's puzzling is that more than 300 pages of the novel go by before the engine of the Zimbalist family car, and thus of the novel's plot, finally turns over, and the much-touted road trip begins. Before that comes a vast and dramatically static stretch of what speculative-fiction circles often call “world-building” — a full, inventive, elaborately detailed portrait of Andersen's vision of the next 19 years of American history. It's fun to read, particularly since it involves the imagined fates of a great many present-day famous people. (Among the many dozens of such cameos, surely one spoiler won't hurt: Elon Musk dies of an overdose en route to Mars.)

As a novelist, Andersen — whose works of nonfiction include “Fantasyland: How America Went Haywire” and “Evil Geniuses: The Unmaking of America” — is more philosopher than plot maker. The will-they-or-won't-they domestic drama of the Zimbalists, when it finally gets out of the driveway, is less than suspenseful; it is very much like spending a week in a car with three people laughing at a series of inside jokes and then explaining to you why those jokes are funny.

But so what? Domestic dramas are already thick on the ground in American fiction. What readers of “The Breakup” will come for, in this moment of what seems like unsustainable polarization and anger and wanton trampling of American civic institutions and ideals, is a vision of our near-term future that is violent and admonitory and cathartically terrible and yet somehow still survivable. On that score, Andersen delivers the dopamine hit that has made his previous work best sellers. In his 2045, there's still a new Sally Rooney novel (one with a very funny title), and the government even offers tax credits to book publishers who hire human beings as copy editors instead of just letting A.I. do it. How dystopian can things be?

Jonathan Dee is the author of eight novels, most recently “Sugar Street,” and the director of the graduate writing program at Syracuse University.

TRAVEL

How to catch the ‘eclipse of the century’

Book for 2027 to witness a blockbuster in parts of Europe, Africa and Mideast

BY DANIELLE DOWLING

FINBARR O’REILLY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The solar eclipse this month in Castrillo de la Reina, Spain. Next summer’s solar eclipse won’t be matched again until 2114. Watching this month’s eclipse, below, in L’Escala, Spain.

If you missed this summer’s eclipse, don’t worry. There are still a handful of opportunities to catch the “eclipse of the century” next year.

Imagine standing beneath a blackened sun among the ancient Egyptian tombs in the Valley of the Kings or overlooking the Nile at the Hatshepsut Temple. The eerie darkness might fill you with a primeval mix of terror, awe and wonder. In other words, perfection.

In the midmorning and afternoon of Aug. 2, 10 countries (and a few territories) on the Mediterranean Sea and in the Middle East and Africa will find themselves in the 160-mile-wide (257-kilometer-wide), nearly 9,500-mile-long zone. In some places, darkness will last as long as an incredible six minutes and 23 seconds.

The strong likelihood of clear weather and a variety of spectacular destinations — the Rock of Gibraltar; the Caves of Hercules near Tangier, Morocco; the beaches of Oran, Algeria; the ancient temples around Luxor, Egypt; and the holy sites of Mecca, Saudi Arabia — add to the can’t-miss appeal.

To catch the eclipse in a prime spot, you’re going to need luck and determination, and you may have to pay a premium. Many spots in the top locations and on the choice expeditions have been snapped up. Waiting lists abound, and hotels are selling out.

But that doesn’t mean you’re too late. Here are some ways to see the show:

SPAIN, GIBRALTAR AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

The Roman ruins of Baelo Claudia near Tarifa, Spain, will be among the first locations to be shrouded in daytime darkness, which will last about four and a half minutes there. Gibraltar will enjoy a similar stint in totality, though if you plan to view the eclipse there, be sure not to climb to the top of the rock; it can get cloudy up high. New Scientist magazine is accepting registrations for a five-day tour that will visit both these destinations but will observe the eclipse from a private terrace at a resort in Conil de la Frontera, Spain.

If you wish to combine travel around Spain and other nearby destinations with a cruise on the Mediterranean, where totality will last up to five minutes, you have options. Celebrity is offering two cruises: an 11-night Italy and Spain trip, with the eclipse falling on Day 8 (from $3,121 per person), and a seven-night Spain and Morocco journey, with the eclipse on Day 3 (from $4,883 per person). And there are still a few rooms left aboard VACAYA LGBTQ+ Vacations’ 10-day eclipse cruise (from $18,963 double occupancy), which sails from Trieste, Italy, to Barcelona.

MOROCCO

Tangier, a popular destination for day-trippers from Europe, will have four minutes and 51 seconds of totality. While you’re there, stroll its historic casbah and visit cafes once frequented by bohemians like William S. Burroughs.

Tours of Distinction will host an 11-day Magical Morocco trip, which starts in Casablanca, stops for the eclipse in Tangier, then heads to Fez and the Sahara (from $3,999). If you’d rather see the eclipse from the water, National Geographic has a 13-day voyage that starts in the Azores, stops to witness the eclipse off the coast of Tangier and ends in Barcelona ($27,181 per person).

Next Aug. 2, Southern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East will witness a solar eclipse with extra-long totality, even longer than the one this year.

DAVID RAMOS/GETTY IMAGES

TUNISIA

Though the zone of totality passes south of Tunis, “Star Wars” fans may be pleased to find that if they act quickly, they still have a chance to spend a little over four minutes of totality in the place Obi-Wan Kenobi called home, thanks to Galaxy Tours. Its six-day journey in Tunisia takes visitors to the setting of the desert planet Tatooine as well as “Indiana Jones” filming locations ($3,295 per person).

ALGERIA

The city of Oran, one of The New York Times 52 Places to Go this year, offers beaches, a historic theater, an annual rai music festival and, during the eclipse, five minutes and eight seconds of darkness. To see other sites in the country, Algeria Travel & Tours has some spots left on its nine-day trip to UNESCO World Heritage sites and cultural institutions. Participants will witness the eclipse at Timgad, a well-preserved ancient Roman military colony near the rugged Aurès Mountains (price quotes available on the company’s website).

EGYPT

If you’re lucky enough to see the spectacle in Egypt — whether from Luxor, the Siwa Oasis or the ancient port of Berenice Troglodytica — you’ll be rewarded with darkness of up to six minutes and 23 seconds. A handful of openings remain on tours offered by groups like Sirius Travel, Astro-Trails and Sky & Telescope (from $2,950 to $11,680). The luxury tour operator Kemetale has already booked one of its dahabiyas — traditional Egyptian sailboats — for an eclipse cruise on the Nile and is planning to make a second available later this year.

Whatever you do, try not to miss this one: The next eclipse with a totality this long won’t happen until June 3, 2114.

Help! I took Air India’s advice, and it cost me $2,000

Tripped Up

BY SETH KUGEL

MATT BLEASE

After a cancellation and long delays, the airline offered to cover the cost of a flight on another carrier. Then it refused to make good on that promise.

DEAR TRIPPED UP,

I was planning to fly Air India from San Francisco to Delhi, and then on to Kolkata, India, on May 31, 2024, to be in town for my mother’s surgery three days later. But after five hours of waiting to take off, passengers were asked to deplane and given a notice announcing that the flight was “canceled due to operational reasons.” According to the printout, which I took a picture of, passengers could choose to be reimbursed or rebooked on the next available Air India flight. But it went on to give a third choice: “In the event that you choose to book with another airline, we will reimburse the fare difference.” There was an Air India flight on June 1 that would still get me into town in time for the operation, so I took that rebooking option. But the next day, Air India notified me that my new flight was delayed enough that I would miss my connection, and the surgery. As a last resort, I bought a round-trip Emirates economy class ticket for $3,855 — $2,038 more the cost of my original $1,817 ticket, which Air India refunded. In the time since, the airline has consistently refused to pay the difference, even when I sent it the photograph of the notice and complained to the U.S. Department of Transportation. Can you help? Amartya, Foster City, Calif.

dingref.com

DEAR AMARTYA,

The Air India representatives in San Francisco who printed and distributed that notice thoughtfully prioritized you and your fellow travelers’ needs over the bottom line of their employer.

In other words, they screwed up.

Airlines rarely offer to cover the difference if passengers facing long delays or cancellations book replacement flights on competing airlines, and no U.S. regulation says they have to. Travelers typically must choose between a refund and the next open seat on the same airline or, in some cases, a partner. It typically doesn’t matter if that means missing your mother’s surgery, your granddaughter’s graduation or even your first oral argument before the Supreme Court.

Those who can afford a last-minute fare pay a sky-high price for it, and those who don’t miss out.

So the Air India offer was unusual. I was not surprised to see in the photo you sent me that the notice distributed in San Francisco did not have the official look of a document approved by someone at headquarters. Instead, it had the Times New Roman, typo-ridden vibes of something you might see on an office bulletin board announcing that there would be birthday cake for Catherine in the conference room at 4 p.m.

The responses you received from Air India representatives when you insisted they keep their promise were, shall we say, more corporate. “We regret to inform you that we are unable to accommodate your request for reimbursement of your new booking,” wrote an agent in an email you forwarded to me. “We are able to reimburse the ticket difference only if Air India will not provide any alternate option.”

Now, that sounds like the airline industry I know. But you had no reason not to take the San Francisco staff members at their (written) word, so I got in touch with Air India, and the airline quickly paid you the $2,038 difference in fare, albeit two years late.

In a follow-up, I asked Air India a series of questions, including whether its customer service department’s refusal to honor the notice at the airport had been in error and what led the carrier to change its mind after I got in touch.

In a statement, Rajesh Dogra, the airline’s chief customer experience officer, gave something of a master class in vagueness.

“We recognize the inconvenience experienced by the customer following the disruption to their travel plans,” he wrote, noting that the airline “remained engaged with the customer through the process and refunded the fare paid by the customer per our standard policy.” He did not answer my question about why the airline had not honored the printed notice, and in fact did not mention the notice at all.

“When the matter was escalated for further review,” he continued, the airline “revalidated the circumstances.” Then he wrote: “Following these discussions, a resolution was reached that was accepted by the customer.” Well, I guess that explains it.

It is worth noting that you acted honorably, accepting a replacement Air India flight the next day rather than instantly snapping up the quickest, most expensive competitor’s flight. It was only when added delays would have made you miss your mother’s surgery that you booked the last-minute seat on Emirates.

You did the right thing by pushing back, respectfully, at Air India, and your complaint to the Transportation Department was also a good idea. (Filing its online form has resolved problems for Tripped Up readers in the past.) But getting airlines to reimburse passengers for routine out-of-pocket expenses can be like pulling teeth, and if those expenses are even slightly unusual — as in the case of a band that had to rent equipment after British Airways ruined and lost its guitars, the topic of a past Tripped Up column — it’s more like a root canal.

Mr. Dogra’s statement concluded: “At Air India, we are committed to understanding individual circumstances and addressing concerns with care, empathy and fairness.”

That sounds like corporate spin. But the description does at least accurately characterize the actions of the Air India staff members on duty in San Francisco on May 31, 2024.

Your guide to securing a lie-flat seat at less cost

Travel via basic business, as airlines offer luxury with stripped-down perks

BY VICTORIA M. WALKER

Roughly a decade ago, major full-service airlines in the United States introduced a new concept: basic economy. Following the playbook of low-cost carriers, these fares offered the cheapest tickets with the fewest perks.

The target: customers with firm travel plans and less money to spend. The airlines limited what basic economy travelers could bring on board, where they could sit and when they boarded the aircraft.

Now, airlines are testing a new basic model — this time, at the front of the plane.

In early July, Delta Air Lines became the latest U.S. carrier to introduce stripped-down premium classes, with lower-price tiers in its first class (known as Delta First), lie-flat business class (Delta One) and premium economy (Premium Select) cabins.

Delta follows United Airlines, which became the first U.S. carrier to offer basic business and premium class options in April. As with basic economy, basic premium fares often aren’t refundable, don’t let travelers pick their seats and don’t earn rewards points. But they can be significantly cheaper. In a search for United business class flights in August, the cheapest basic business class ticket on a one-way flight from Newark to London was about $2,000; a full-service ticket cost nearly $1,000 more.

Basic business is not an entirely new concept. Several carriers outside the United States, including Etihad Airways, Emirates and Zipair, a Japanese airline, have adopted pared-down premium classes. Airlines have billed basic business class as all the benefits you want and none that you don’t, for a lower price.

Airlines are testing a new basic model at the front of the plane.

Some experts aren’t sold. “Basic economy was one of the biggest genius moves at the time because it allowed those airlines to compete with discounters on an equal level,” said Brian Sumers, an industry journalist and editor of The Airline Observer, a newsletter covering the business of airlines.

The biggest lure of basic business: a lie-flat seat at a significant discount, especially on long-haul flights to Europe or Asia, where flights can last up to 14 hours and full-service tickets can top more than $3,000 each way.

Here’s a guide for travelers on the airlines offering some version of basic business and what it costs.

UNITED AIRLINES

What it’s called: Polaris Base on long-haul international, and Base Business on transcontinental U.S. routes, and on some flights to Hawaii.

What it costs: A Polaris Base ticket from Newark to Dublin in December is $4,100 round-trip; the standard fare is $4,500.

DELTA AIR LINES

What it’s called: Basic Delta First on some domestic and Latin American flights, and Basic Business and Basic Premium Select on some domestic and long-haul international flights.

What it costs: Fares on specific routes are not yet available. Basic Delta One flights will start in September. In Delta’s announcement, it said a Basic Delta One ticket was $200 cheaper than a Classic ticket.

ZIPAIR

Zipair is a low-cost airline based out of Narita International Airport, 45 minutes from Tokyo. The airline serves a handful of U.S. cities, including Los Angeles, San Francisco and Orlando, Fla.

What it’s called: Zipair calls its business class Full-Flat. It then lets you pick the amenities you want with what it calls bundles, at the Value, Flex Biz and Premium levels.

What it costs: Round-trip Full-Flat between Los Angeles and Tokyo can often be found for as low as $2,700. Bundles start at around $200 more. Zipair’s loyalty program is extremely limited.

You can keep costs closer to the base fare by packing your own meals, (non-alcoholic) beverages and blankets.

EMIRATES

What it’s called: Special fares.

What it costs: Round-trip Special fares between the United States and East Asia start at around $6,100 round-trip, while the next-step-up Saver tickets (which include chauffeur service, lounge access and free seat selection) start at around $7,250.

ETIHAD AIRWAYS

What it’s called: Business Value.

What it costs: Business Value tickets cost around $7,700 round-trip between New York and Abu Dhabi, the airline’s home base, while standard business tickets cost around $800 more.

Jewelry

A Cut Above

Settings From left, scenes from Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter: a passerby checks out a shop on Vyse Street; a staff member shows items to customers at Newey's Jewellers; and the craftsman Patrick Lambert surrounded by tools in his PW Lambert workshop.

Can this city keep its gems?

The Jewellery Quarter has housed one of Birmingham's prime industries for centuries, but some now worry that widening gentrification is a threat

BIRMINGHAM, ENGLAND

BY SUSANNE FOWLER
PHOTOS BY CHARLOTTE HADDEN

For many in England, the Jewellery Quarter in Birmingham is *the* place to go for pieces that mark life's milestones.

Sitting at a picnic table outside a neighborhood cafe recently, Taylor, 34, raised her left hand to admire a ring that she and her fiancé had just picked up from Aardvark Jewellery. The wedding ring, featuring a central lab-grown diamond in a platinum bezel setting with leaf details and small diamond accents, cost about 1,600 pounds ($2,160).

"I'm wearing it just for today, and then it will go back in the box until October," when she and Andy, 37, plan to elope. (They asked that only their first names be used because their plans have been secret.)

Taylor's ties to the quarter date to her childhood, when she used to visit a jewelry shop owned by a friend of her father. Now her friends, she said, often venture to the area "for drinks, the bars, a night out: It's a bit more chilled than being in the middle of Birmingham."

Andy chimed in, saying, "Everyone comes here for their rings. My dad got Mom's wedding ring from here; my sister got a wedding ring from here; my mate got his engagement and wedding rings from here as well. There's just lots of jewelers here."

Artistry The Jewellery Quarter workshop of Deakin & Francis, a seventh-generation jewelry and accessories business.

CENTURIES OF CRAFTSMANSHIP

That has been true since the mid-18th century, when goldsmiths and silversmiths dotted the area and expert setters, mounters and enamelers set up workshops. Today the quarter — about a mile from Birmingham's New Street train station — covers about 270 acres in this multicultural West Midlands city of more than 1.1 million residents.

The area is also home to the School of Jewellery, established in 1890 and now part of Birmingham City University, which offers courses in computer-assisted design, gemology and brand management.

In 2025, an international crafts organization named Birmingham a World Craft City in recognition of its jewelry heritage. Yet the industry has been shrinking, and workshops have been replaced by shiny new high-rises or turned into loft-style apartments amid hip coffee shops, hair salons, hotels and bars. Some of the quarter's independent makers say they fear for the future of the craft and its artisans as the area transitions from a makers' economy to a service one.

A few centuries-old companies have survived, such as Deakin & Francis and Thomas Fattorini Ltd. And the Birmingham Assay Office, established in 1773, remains the busiest site in Britain for testing and hallmarking precious metals, assessing about two million pieces a year.

Before World War II, an estimated 70,000 people earned money from the jewelry trade in Birmingham. Today, that number has declined to about 4,000 workers at some 700 jewelry-related businesses, including scores of retail shops, according to Ben Massey, chief executive of the National Association of Jewellers, which has its headquarters in the city.

The jewelry trade in the quarter still generates £750 million in annual revenue, according to an email from Steve Lovell, a spokesman for the Jewellery Quarter Development Trust, a group working to preserve and revitalize the area.

While window displays of glittering gold and silver pieces are scattered through the area, evidence of the quarter's industrial past is still visible in the network of narrow streets lined with three- and four-floor brick buildings — former rowhouses or workshops — dating from the 1800s. A case in point is the storefront at 70-80 Vyse Street, the former offices and workshop of Smith & Pepper, a manufacturer that opened in 1899.

A 'TIME CAPSULE'

Charles Smith and his uncle, Edwin Pepper, employed dozens of men and women to specialize in creating items such as gold bangles with bamboo or Egyptian-style serpentine motifs. Three of Mr. Smith's children eventually took over the business, with his daughter Olive becoming the company secretary.

But demand eventually slumped and in 1981, with the unmarried owners in their 70s and 80s with no direct heirs, the business closed. Workers downed tools, leaving unfinished bits and bobs on their workbenches and Miss Olive's office packed with piles of memos, invoices and receipts.

The site, housing such memorabilia as a row of wooden workbenches, leather aprons and specialty tools, now is home to the Museum of the Jewellery Quarter. Conservators have photographed, cataloged and replaced about 70,000 items once used in the approximately 172-square-meter (about 1,850-square-foot) workshop and that now show what life was like for its dozens of employees.

Susie Longstaff, 33, recently escorted a small group on what she called a 45-minute "time capsule" tour. (Timed tickets are generally available Thursday through Sunday; £10 per adult; £5 per child age 3-15.)

Preservation Left, from top, the Museum of the Jewellery Quarter in Birmingham contains tens of thousands of items showing what life was like for workers at the former Smith & Pepper manufacturing site; boxes and paperwork left behind when the business shut down; and a guide taking visitors on a tour (available Thursdays through Sundays).

"It was really hot, noisy: You were expected to have peak concentration," Ms. Longstaff said. "We had what was rather unflatteringly known as women's work in workshops; your polishing girls, your crafts girls. The majority of these were local working-class women who were paid by piece and half the rate of the men."

By 1981, the owners had "been served with a dilapidation order, because health and safety standards were subpar," Ms. Longstaff explained, "and they weren't making any money. Now, there were only six members of staff left so in that situation they tried to sell it, but it wasn't happening."

"They didn't clean up, they didn't put things in boxes, they just left," she said.

Well-worn shop coats still hang in the workshop. Jars of jam and sugar sit in the tea-break room, unexpectedly close to a container of crystallized cyanide once used in the manufacturing process.

After the tour, Eva Lamm, 49, a graphic designer from Berlin, said she was in Birmingham to attend a roller skating festival and had never heard of its Jewellery Quarter before her visit. "I saw it had a jewelry museum, and I'm interested in beautiful things and I'm interested in crafts," she said. "I like seeing how things are manufactured, so that's why I came here."

What she found most interesting was the workshop, she said, "and the fact that it's just left as it was, and you can really see what the work environment was, the tools, the techniques and all the paper records that we now do digitally."

MODERN MAKERS

In another contrast, many of today's independent jewelers working out of similar but smaller spaces are helped by traffic to their websites or displays in gift shops.

Local contemporary artists, including jewelers, showcase and sell their creations at the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists' RBSA Gallery near St. Paul's Square. A recent gift shop display included handcrafted minimalist silver designs from the Solv&Kopper brand by Martina Shakespeare, who honed her craft at the jewelry school's evening classes. Work was also on display from the local designer Josefina Flello Martinez, whose brand Atypical Thing specializes in recycled materials such as gold and garnets. (She is scheduled to lead a three- to four-hour £110 hands-on workshop on lost-wax carving Sept. 5 at the Jewellery Quarter museum. Afterward, the participants' rings will be cast in recycled sterling silver, polished and mailed to them.)

Kyrsty Jones, 27, an artist who has lived in the quarter since 2019, was running the gallery's front desk recently. One of the area's biggest challenges, she said, "was trying to get tourists and others to walk up here from the center and

QUARTER, PAGE S10

Bling for your bag?

Designers are creating fine jewelry pieces that can be worn in many ways, including as a sparkly accent on a high-end purse

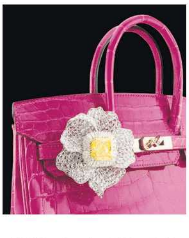
BY VICTORIA GOMELSKY

When Ashna Mehta, a designer who lives and works in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, came to the stage during the Couture Design Awards, an annual ceremony in May at the Wynn Las Vegas, she carried an Hermès Kelly Pochette bag in blue ostrich leather. As she spoke, two diamond charms attached to the bag, a daisy and a New York Yankees logo, both of her design, caught the spotlight.

That, in essence, was the point. Ms. Mehta had won first prize in the haute couture category for her entry, Gilded Bloom, a diamond-encrusted floral jewel designed to accessorize a Birkin or Kelly bag.

The piece, which could be worn as a necklace, pendant or brooch, highlighted a 36.89-carat fancy intense cushion-cut yellow diamond framed by 6.65 carats of kite-shape diamonds and surrounded by petals with 34.9 carats of rose-cut diamonds. Boasting all natural gems, it is valued at $2.1 million.

“I’m trying to reinvent the way jewelry is worn,” Ms. Mehta said in a recent video interview from London, where she lives part-time. “I grew up going to weddings in India, where we lock our jewelry in vaults and we take it out to wear for special occasions. I wanted to make jewelry that was versatile and that could work in nontraditional ways.”



Next level
Ashna Mehta, far left, came up with the idea for her Bag Bijoux collection when she and her sister were looking for ways to personalize their Hermès handbags. Near left, the Gilded Bloom, a piece from the collection valued at $2.1 million. Below, the Royal Pop, a pocket watch released by Audemars Piguet and Swatch in May, was sold on a calfskin lanyard, with the idea of moving the timepiece “beyond the wrist.”

A NEW CATEGORY

Fine jewels have, since at least the 19th century, been made to be transformed: Imagine tiaras that could be turned into bracelets or brooches that could become pendants. Only recently, however, have designers begun to experiment with more extreme transformations.

Ms. Mehta, whose family owns the Belgian Indian diamond manufacturer Rosy Blue, came up with the idea for Bag Bijoux — a range of 18-karat gold bag charms that includes initials, hearts and other symbols inspired by animals, nature, sports and travel — when she and her younger sister, Aria, were looking for ways to personalize their Hermès handbags in 2024.

Instead of opting for colorful friendship bracelets or plushies (the Labubu craze was just beginning), the sisters wanted to render their initials in natural diamonds and gold — but with the charms engineered so that they would not damage the resale value of their bags and could be converted into pendants. (“There’s so much R&D that went into it,” Ms. Mehta said. “The weight needs to be perfect so it doesn’t damage the straps. And it needs to clip on very securely so even if you shake the bag, it never falls off.”)

The Bag Bijoux collection, which debuted last year with pieces ranging from $2,800 to about $50,000, is one of the few precious offerings, if not the only one, in the handbag accessory market. But retailers who stock it said it heralded the birth of a new fine jewelry segment.

“It’s a completely new category and it’s so cool because it’s so different,” said Emily Wansbrough, the buying manager for fine jewelry and watches at the online luxury retailer Mytheresa. The company was preparing to introduce Bag Bijoux to its online curation this month.

“For a customer who already has so many amazing things, they haven’t pimped up their handbag yet and I think they need to — everyone needs to,” Ms. Wansbrough noted. “What’s clever about Ashna is that it’s not just about the bag. You can also put it on your belt or you could wear it as a necklace. And that’s how we’re going to shoot it when we upload it.

“We’re going to showcase it on a belt and we’re going to showcase it on a bag and then also to be worn on a chain,” she added. “So it doesn’t feel like you’re buying just one thing for a handbag.”

At Moda Operandi, a high-end online fashion retailer in New York City, Ryan Kleman, the company’s vice president of non-apparel, said Ms. Mehta’s Bag Bijoux charms had performed well in online trunk shows over the past year because the jewels offered clients an unexpected way to show off their personalities.

“We’ve sold initials, we’ve sold zodiac symbols, we’ve sold the New York Yankees pendant,” Mr. Kleman said. “It’s how you express yourself through diamonds and gold. And obviously, being able to wear it on a necklace but also put it on your bag is just added value.

“People collect cars, people collect homes, people collect bags — why not add the ultimate charm?”

WATCH THIS SPACE

Many people in the watch world have been asking the same question. In May, the Swiss brands Audemars Piguet and Swatch released a pocket watch called the Royal Pop that was sold on a calfskin lanyard. In the marketing copy, the watchmakers made clear the timepiece was intended to move “beyond the wrist.”

Almost immediately, watch pundits predicted the $400 timepiece would find its greatest expression as a high-end handbag bauble. “Bye Bye Labubu and Hermès Charms: The Royal Pop Is the New It-Object for Your Bag” proclaimed a headline in the industry magazine WatchTime.

“Everything suggests this timepiece will rarely be worn on the wrist,” Johannes Beer, the magazine’s junior editor, wrote in that article. “Instead, expect to see it clipped to bags, belt loops, backpacks, worn around the neck, or dangling from a Stanley mug or golf bag.”

Louis Vuitton embraced the same philosophy in June, when models in Pharrell Williams’s spring 2027 men’s show in Paris wore the newest iteration of the brand’s classic Monterey watch, now encased in ceramic and set in a leather keychain-like charm, casually dangling from belt loops.

While the Monterey Ceramic, due in stores near the end of September, is to be sold as a $22,900 wristwatch, “the charm seen on the show is in development and will be sold separately from the watch to those who wish to purchase it,” the brand said in an email statement.

READY-TO-WEAR

Likewise, a growing number of jewelers are expanding their own definitions of wearability to give their clients additional reasons to buy. At the end of 2025, for example, Courtney Leidy, a fine jeweler in Palm Beach, Fla., began to envision her signature Double Flip gemstone pendants being worn in unconventional ways. (The pieces feature dual bails, or metal rings, that allow them to be clipped easily to handbags or belts.)

“I love the idea of placing authorship in the hands of the customer,” Ms. Leidy said on a phone call last month from Newport, R.I., where she was spending the summer with her family. “You could wear a Double Flip pendant in a stack on your neck, one solo, or you could wear it on your purse or clip it on to a belt.

“My customers come back to me and say, ‘What I love so much about your jewelry is that I can play around with it,’” Ms. Leidy added. “I love Van Cleef but you can’t do much with the clover pendant. People love having the creative freedom to wear my jewelry however they want.”

Adding a precious accessory to a high-end handbag does not just lend the jewel added value, Ms. Leidy noted. “Bags are so expensive now — it’s also a way to breathe new life into your handbag,” she said. “People have seen the Labubus and tchotchkes but if you’re wearing a Birkin, you want something that’s aligned with that. These fine jewelry accessories transcend trends.”

For Toby Vernon, the founder and creative director of The Ouze — a line of silver jewels that now includes two leather bags featuring hardware with the same raw, textured aesthetic as his jewelry — accessories offer another way of marketing his London brand.

“I think a lot about how the jewelry is transported,” Mr. Vernon said. “You have the jewelry, the display box is bespoke and the bag is bespoke. It’s all this Ouze world building.”

Put a pin in it
Toby Vernon, the founder and creative director of The Ouze, sees accessories as offering another way of marketing his brand. His brand’s bags, the Hallmarked Bag, near right in black, and the Weekender Leather Bag, can be customized with gems, pins or engraving.

CUSTOM CREATIONS

At the same time, Mr. Vernon also sees potential in offering bespoke tags for the brand’s Hallmarked bag, which features a silver ingot at the base of one of its straps. “We could set gems in it, engrave it — it’s a little blank you could customize,” he said.

Indeed, Ms. Mehta’s customized Bag Bijoux creations — for Mindy Kaling, Nita Ambani and Kylie Jenner, among others — are some of her most sought-after pieces and have earned her brand millions of views on social media. In February, for example, Ms. Jenner, the founder of Kylie Cosmetics, tagged Ms. Mehta in an Instagram post showing off her silver Kelly bag adorned with a bespoke Bag Bijoux charm in the shape of her brand’s logo — a pouty pair of pink ceramic lips dripping with diamond gloss.

“It’s a walking billboard wherever she goes,” Ms. Mehta said in July during a follow-up phone interview from Dallas, where she was showing her collection — including a $17,180 pink and white ceramic and diamond boot charm created exclusively for the U.S. market — at a Neiman Marcus pop-up.

Julia Chafé, a jewelry designer and content creator in New York who is friends with Ms. Mehta, praised the Bag Bijoux collection and the idea of luxe handbag jewels in general, though she noted they do not always work on less expensive handbags.

“A brand gifted me a gold and diamond pendant when I gave birth to my son last year,” Ms. Chafé said. “I don’t have neck space so I turned it into a bag charm and it looked so stupid. It just cheapened the jewelry.

“But the way Ashna does it is ultra luxury, ultra chic,” Ms. Chafé added. “If you’re living in a community of people who are all uber wealthy and everybody has these coveted bags and accessories, how do you stand out? This is the next level.”

Looking beyond belts

People are using earrings, necklaces and charms to dress up this very practical accessory — or just adding some shine to their waistlines.

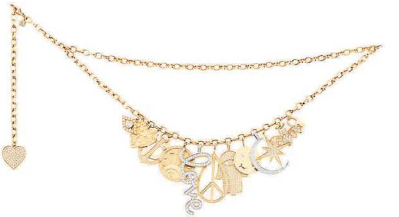
BY MELANIE ABRAMS

When the jewelry designer Angie Marei sold a 14-karat white gold and diamond hoop earring to an advertising executive, she never imagined he would hook the jewel onto a metal belt loop rather than wear it in his ear.

But when he stopped by her New York City atelier recently to pick up a set of black onyx agate drop earrings for his wife, the diamonds that cover the hoop earring’s surface and its inner curve stood out against his sleek black suit, dark shirt and black leather belt, Ms. Marei said in a recent phone interview.

It was just one example of how customers have been adding necklaces, charms, earrings and other pieces to their belts in an effort to express themselves, she noted.

The style is “a bit of a spill over from the bag charm,” said Rachel Bakewell, a London stylist who counts the actresses Jodie Comer and Maisie Williams among those she has dressed. “When the Labubu doll and everything became so huge and so did personalizing your bag.”



NINA WESTERVELT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

JUTHARAT PINYODOONYACHET FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Midline shine
Above, a 14-karat gold and diamond chain belt by Sydney Evan, hung with over a dozen charms, including a diamond protective eye. Far left, Troye Sivan, a South African singer and actor, added chain necklaces and charms to the Prada jeans he wore to the Met Gala in May. Center, the American singer Collins Obinna Chibueze, better known as Shaboozey, wore a Mikimoto Akoya pearl and diamond tassel necklace as a belt to the Oscars in March.

And the trend has been taking off, especially among Gen Z, as it is “a little bit rebellious,” said Alessandro Filippo Ficarelli, the co-creative director at Pandora. The Danish jewelry brand has been styling celebrities this way for about two years, such as adding chain necklaces with charms including a 14-karat gold plated dice ($88) to the Prada jeans that the South African singer and actor Troye Sivan wore to the Met Gala in May.

Other events have seen the look too. At the Oscars in March, the American singer Collins Obinna Chibueze, better known as Shaboozey, wore a $35,000 Mikimoto Akoya pearl and diamond tassel necklace as a belt, but stitched to the inside of his black tuxedo jacket and high-waist trousers — “to make sure that it was as secure as possible,” said Anastasia Walker, his stylist.

Catwalks have been featuring jewelry on belts too. Take Marc Jacobs, who opened his spring 2027 women’s wear show in June with a model wearing a resin heart charm on a resin and brass chain belt over her sheer organza straight leg jeans.

And at Celine, which has been selling a $5,700 black silk jumpsuit with a brass link chain at the waist for charms, the creative director Michael Rider dangled charms such as a brass horn with a rhodium finish from a leather belt in his spring 2027 men’s wear show in Paris in June.

So why is the trend having such impact?

“People are being a lot more adventurous,” said Emily Wansbrough, the buying manager of fine jewelry and watches at the online sale site Mytheresa. Pieces offered through its personal shopping service include Sydney Evan’s 14-karat yellow gold and diamond chain belt with 14 charms including a diamond protective eye and gold smiley face, which also could be worn as a necklace ($81,780 or about 74,000 British pounds).

“Those customers who are frequently buying for their fingers, their necks, their earrings, they’ve got a lot of that now,” Ms. Wansbrough said. “What else can they adorn?”

Several designers have been offering options.

Beth Hutchens, the founder and creative director of the FoundRae fine jewelry line in New York City, said she designed a pair of interlocking clasps, also called sister hooks, so customers could add charms, pendants or medallions to the brand’s 18-karat gold necklaces.

The hooks have wide openings, she said, so they also could be used to clip a necklace to different belt loops or to clip one end of a necklace to a belt loop while the other was tucked into a pocket, “like a watch fob,” she said.

Some of the hooks have pavé diamonds, such as the ones sold with the small 18-karat yellow gold mixed clip chain (from $9,250).

Since about 2020, Allison Fry, the founder and creative director of the New York City jewelry brand Fry Powers, has been transforming her bracelets into charms that could hang from belt loops, as she said she “wanted to show my sense of style.”

Now, she has a clasping link, offered in silver and two gold options, that can hook charms such as a 14 karat yellow gold Ombre Circle Charm Pendant with an orange citrine ($550) to chain necklaces or a belt loop “for the more adventurous clients,” she said.

Marc Forné, a stylist in Barcelona, Spain, likes to dress his male clients, such as Sebastián Yatra, a Columbian singer who is a Tiffany & Company brand ambassador, in belts with jewelry because “adding jewelry to belts could be a way to have fun with the men’s wear which sometimes is not as simple and has more limitations” than women’s designs, he said.

But, he cautioned, he would avoid putting any jewelry on a belt with a big buckle “as the belt is already a lot,” he said.

What’s next in the trend?

For fall, brooches are the jewels to wear on a belt, according to Ms. Bakewell, the London stylist.

“You can either put one through an eyelet of the belt, if it fits,” she said. “But you can also get ones that have a magnetic clasp on your brooch so you can put it on the other side of your belt, because obviously it’s quite hard as you can’t really go through the leather bit.”

Ms. Bakewell said she doesn’t like to wear a brooch on her lapel or bodice — “there’s something a little bit old fashioned about it,” she noted. So she has been clipping a tulip brooch through one eye of a leather belt that she wears with her dresses as, she said, it “looks romantic and soft.”

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MATERIALS

A blue stone with a cool vibe

Sodalite has been taking the place of pricey lapis lazuli in some jewelry creations

BY MING LIU

Lapis lazuli — a name that translates as "blue stone" in Latin and Persian — has long been the azure stone of choice for most jewelers. But the hard stone sodalite has been stealing much of its spotlight recently.

Jewelers say they have been drawn to sodalite's cool and modern vibe, created in part by the signature white calcite striations that give a distinctive touch to each creation. But the fact that lapis lazuli has become increasingly difficult to source has also contributed to the trend.

Most of the best quality lapis lazuli comes from Afghanistan, and Meg Berry, an award-winning gem carver in California, said most of the country's gemstone mines have been destroyed because of continued conflict. "The political situation has made it very difficult to access and trade in those materials, so lapis is much less available than it ever has been in the last 50 years," she said. "It's quite a diminished supply."

A 2016 report by the nonprofit organization Global Witness linked mining of the stone to the Taliban and called for it to be labeled a "conflict mineral."

Prices also reflect such scarcity, Ms. Berry said, with rough lapis lazuli selling for at least three to four times more than sodalite.

Enter sodalite, which earlier this year debuted in Louis Vuitton's Color Blossom fine jewelry collection. First created in 2015, the line features ornamental stones sculpted in the flower and star shapes found on Louis Vuitton's Monogram canvas, a signature motif of the luxury house.

Sodalite joined the six stones already used in the collection: white and pink mother-of-pearl; malachite; cornelian, which also is known as carnelian; Amazonite, a kind of feldspar; and onyx. And while it was chosen for its similarity to lapis lazuli, the global director of Louis Vuitton's stone purchasing department wrote in an email, its South African origins were also part of its appeal. The director, who is not allowed to be named according to Louis Vuitton's policy, said the company wanted a stone that met the house's sourcing criteria for traceability and compliance.

Traditionally gemstones are valued for their flawlessness and clarity, but sodalite's striations seem to be its very appeal. The Louis Vuitton director, for example, said the white veins helped to soften the stone's color to a "delicate, medium-saturation blue."

And some say sodalite, which was discovered by Europeans in the 19th century, has a particularly contemporary allure.

"Lapis lazuli has a historical prestige that sodalite will never have," said Jean-Bernard Forot, the head of patrimony at Piaget. "Lapis lazuli has been used since antiquity, in Egypt and Mesopotamia; it has been on the treasure of kings and sometimes set on divinities.

"Sodalite will never have the same story, but we can discover something that we don't know. It's a much more modern ornamental stone."

The stone actually has been seeing something of a revival at Piaget. It first appeared in 1963 as one of the dial choices in the house's Style Selector service, which allowed customers to personalize features such as dial shape and bracelet style.

Sodalite then made its way onto the dial of a 1965 Piaget watch. And this year it was one of the three stones used in the house's High Jewelry Mobile desk clock, which Mr. Forot likened to a "contemporary painting."

Sodalite was also chosen for the dial of Piaget's latest white gold Polo 79 watch, unveiled in April as one of the revivals of the sports watch design introduced in 1979.

After featuring lapis lazuli and onyx dials in the collection, the choice of sodalite offered "a kind of discovery and intellectual curiosity," Mr. Forot said. "We are reopening the doors to stones that were less used in the past."

Other large jewelry houses have also been exploring the stone. Van Cleef & Arpels used sodalite and lapis lazuli in its latest high jewelry collection, called Fascinating Egypt. For example, a pair of Disques Solaires earrings wrapped two sodalite disks in gold and diamonds, creating a shape that echoed the cow horns and sun disk headdress often shown on figures of the Egyptian goddess Hathor.

At Pomellato, specifically the Memorie d'Archivio Bisanzio collection, which revived archival designs, designers mixed sodalite with other blue-tinged stones in pieces such as a pendant cross studded with blue and light blue sapphires, sodalite and diamonds.

Lily Gabriella, an independent jeweler who divides her time between London and Monaco, has long been a fan of ornamental stones. "They have a lot of character," she said.

So when it came to sodalite, Ms. Gabriella said she has been drawn to its blueish-violet hues and the striations that make "every specimen different."

"I like things that are not common," she added, "and which are unique and quirky."

Known for her playful jewels, Ms. Gabriella's latest Halo collection featured sodalite among the mismatched ornamental stone disks that can be transformed, with the use of diamond-studded hoops, into earrings and pendants.

The jeweler Francesca Villa, who lives in Solonghello, Italy, first began using sodalite two years ago in her Change Your Stripes bracelet, a reversible jewel that paired vintage 1950s cameos with slices of hard stones. And this year she introduced the In Your Element collection, again featuring cameos and hard stones in graphic motifs.

Ms. Villa said sodalite's natural veins make her creations feel one-of-a-kind.

"Sodalite is not just one color — you can really find different shades of blue — and the inclusions are so natural and beautiful," she said. "I'm trying to keep rather than avoid them."

But, she emphasized, that did not mean simply including inclusions for inclusions sake, but rather finding the right ones. "There is a way to accept the imperfections of inclusions," she said, "which is part of my design path."

Distinct blues
Above, from left to right: Piaget's latest white gold Polo 79 watch features a sodalite dial; a ring from Louis Vuitton with a sodalite flower in the luxury house's signature motif; a pair of Disques Solaires earrings using sodalite, gold and diamonds by Van Cleef & Arpels; the jeweler Francesca Villa's The Union necklace and her The Balance ring, both made partly out of sodalite; and the jeweler Lily Gabriella's sodalite & aventurine Halo earrings.

IN RETAIL

Japan's next level vintage

Its stellar reputation for rigorously assessing jewelry for resale attracts buyers from around the world

TOKYO

BY VIVIAN MORELLI

In the basement of the Komehyo Shinjuku Women store, the level devoted entirely to pre-loved fine jewelry, a sales assistant slid open a glass case and began arranging some Van Cleef & Arpels rings on a velvet tray. "For the vintage jewelry items, meaning 30 years or older, we rarely receive the same piece twice," said Sota Shirai, who was wearing a small bee brooch on his blazer.

The price tag on one chunky yellow gold ring encrusted with a diamond butterfly read 1.3 million yen, or $8,155 at current exchange rates. And the country's tax reimbursement offer would cut that price by 10 percent for foreign buyers.

Shoppers might debate the price, but they definitely couldn't walk into a Van Cleef boutique and buy the same piece — the house doesn't make it any more.

Such buys are not unusual in Tokyo. As the country's tourism has grown and the value of its yen has declined in recent years, the city has become a global hub for hunters of vintage and resale luxury jewelry and watches.

But what is attracting them is not just the favorable exchange rate: It is Japan's reputation, earned over decades in the resale trade, for authenticating, grading and preserving jewelry with a rigor that many collectors say they cannot find anywhere else.

TRUST BUILT ON LOUPE

Norman Seck, a jewelry and watches collector who lives in Singapore, said serendipity rules during his regular visits to Japan. "I seldom plan for a purchase unless it's something that is very difficult to come by," he wrote in an email. "Most of the time, the pieces I acquire are the ones I stumble upon by surprise."

His most recent find in Tokyo was an oval link bracelet adorned with skulls by Gaboratory, a Los Angeles brand founded by the designer Gabor Nagy in the late 1980s. His chunky handcrafted silver pieces predate such well-known contemporary brands as Chrome Hearts, and have become increasingly sought after in Tokyo's resale market.

In this case, Mr. Seck found the piece in a secondhand shop called The Used Lounge in the Shibuya district.

"The pristine quality of the jewelry by Japanese dealers is definitely the reason I purchase from them," he wrote. "What really stands out to me is the level of detail that Japanese dealers will look into. They make sure I understand it, super well, before I even make the decision to purchase. It's down to hairline scratches only visible with a loupe."

Shellman
ANTIQUE
Jewellery and watches

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREW FAULK FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

While the weak yen has helped sales, Mr. Seck said his purchases are not all about price: "Buying secondhand and vintage jewelry does help in refining my taste and preference, appreciating the craft and understanding the philosophy of the designer."

Data seems to show that lots of visitors like Mr. Seck trust Japanese retailers. According to Mr. Shirai at Komehyo, tax-free purchases by visitors now account for about 40 percent of all sales at the company's several Shinjuku locations, where jewelry sales alone rose 48 percent between January and June.

And Komehyo purchasers using American passports to qualify for tax reimbursements increased over the same six-month period, he said, while Chinese tourist spending ranks second now. (Political tensions between China and Japan have cut into to tourism numbers.)

The tourist pattern, according to Mr. Shirai, is unmistakably American now. "Many arrive after searching for 'vintage' or 'jewelry' on Google Maps rather than any coordinated tour," he said.

And their most requested brands, he noted, remain the classics: Tiffany & Company and Van Cleef & Arpels and Cartier, with its signature Cartier Love bracelet as a particularly consistent seller. Komehyo also stocks a selection of Chanel costume jewelry, a category that Mr. Shirai said draws its own steady following.

The pieces arrive for sale through two main channels, he explained: public auctions and individual sellers.

And, he added, each item, regardless of origin, passes through Komehyo's Product Center in Nagoya, Japan, where inspectors, X-ray machines, specific-gravity meters, diamond testers and other specialized inspection equipment verify materials, craftsmanship and markings. Staff members also often contact makers directly to confirm a piece's maintenance history and flag any alterations.

But the deeper explanation of why many resale pieces are in mint condition might be cultural. "Japanese owners tend to treat jewelry, along with watches and handbags, as something closer to an asset than an accessory, often preserving original boxes and packaging and keeping pieces in condition to sell as is," Mr. Shirai said.

In a company survey of about 600 Komehyo customers, almost 60 percent said they think about resale value when buying expensive items. "It's a mindset that traces back, in part, to an Edo-era culture of maintaining goods during Japan's centuries of isolation from foreign trade," Mr. Shirai said, referring to the period from 1603 to 1868.

ONE OF A KIND

However at Shellman, an antique business specializing in watches and jewelry since 1971, "sourcing runs almost entirely through longstanding relationships with dealers in the U.K., France and elsewhere in Europe," said Chiharu Igarashi, the manager of Shellman's Aoyama district shop. "Because the pieces are antique, supply is inherently limited, so buyers select what they consider exceptional rather than stocking to meet demand."

In her store, pieces of jewelry from different historic periods shimmered behind the glass windows in dark wood cabinets. Among them were two Edwardian pieces found in Britain: a gold-rimmed pendant depicting a pair of doves among flowering branches, made of hundreds of tiny glass pieces set by hand (¥660,000), and a garland-style necklace in white gold, set with cascading diamonds and Australian opals (¥2.2 million).

Ms. Igarashi recalled that one client paid more for a coveted piece in Japan, confident it had been assessed rigorously, after declining to buy the same item in the United States or Europe. "They use us as a filter," she said.

TRICKLE EFFECT

Not all Japanese retailers got into the resale business on purpose.

At L o'clock, a small independent watch shop in the Setagaya district, its owner, Naoto Akiyama, recently started selling some pre-owned accessories from Hermès and Tiffany. "We actually started carrying them at the request of one of the apparel stores we supply watches to," he said. "We buy them from that store, and any extra pieces are displayed in our shop."

He said he has also noticed that more vintage watch shops, his own included, are starting to stock Hermès silver accessories, particularly pieces such as the Chaîne d'Ancre bracelet.

"I think watches and jewelry have always been closely related, so it feels like a natural progression," he continued. "Also, because the supply of vintage watches is limited, adding jewelry or accessories seems like a natural way for shops to complement their watch business.

"Whether this trend will ultimately be good for the industry or not, though, I'm not really sure."

Yet foreign visitors on their way to the nearby Gotokuji temple, known as the "cat temple," often stop to look at watches such as the popular Seiko Lord Matic and the shop's selection of Tiffany and Hermès pieces.

"My impression," Mr. Akiyama said, "is that people feel more confident buying them because they're being sold by a Japanese store."

Tokyo finds
Far left, the exterior of Shellman, an antiques store. Center, from top to bottom: an antique enamel choker necklace with velvet ribbon from the Victorian era for sale at Shellman, a Van Cleef & Arpels vintage butterfly ring and a Cartier Juste un Clou yellow gold bracelet and Cartier Love bracelet both available at Komehyo Shinjuku Women. Above, shoppers eye the display case at Komehyo Vintage Aoyama.

BEHIND THE BRAND

An inability to visualize didn't stop him

The Irish jewelry maker Mark Newman made his own creative system, inspired by functional patterns such as road layouts

BY KATE YOUDE

Mark Newman can't picture his partner's face when they are apart, nor his own designs. "It's just dead," he said, referring to his inability to conjure images in his mind's eye. "I can't visualize anything."

The Irish fine jeweler, 33, has aphantasia, the term coined in 2015 for the neurological variation in which a person is unable to form mental images. Extreme aphantasia, as experienced by Mr. Newman, affects about 1 percent of all people, according to a scientific paper published in 2024.

As a result, Mr. Newman has developed his own algorithmic, nonvisual approach to design, producing a distinctive jewelry style that has garnered industry recognition.

Bryna Pomp, a contemporary jewelry expert and director of MAD About Jewelry, the annual contemporary jewelry sale at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York City, described Mr. Newman's work as "completely original."

She was on the jury for the 2024-25 edition of the Preziosa Young international contest for emerging artists, held in Florence, Italy, which gave Mr. Newman a special mention. "I have never seen anybody else do anything the least bit comparable to him," she added.

Mr. Newman said his path into jewelry was accidental and predetermined.

As he is severely dyslexic, he struggled with academic subjects at school and, gravitating toward art, decided to study at the National College of Art and Design in his native Dublin to become an art teacher. But he switched to a degree in craft design, specializing in metalwork, after realizing he enjoyed working with his hands.

A collection he created to qualify for graduation was inspired by his longing for memories of his childhood.

"It was kind of an omen where I was making jewelry about how I can't think about any of these experiences when I was a kid because I don't have the visual recollection to go with it," he said. (He now lives in Glasgow, Scotland, but spent time this summer in Dublin, crafting jewelry in his childhood bedroom at the bench that his father made for him when he graduated from college.)

Mr. Newman said he "scraped a pass," but was told that his sketchbooks were not good and he lacked design development. "But I could still make things, and I could make them well," he said.

So he decided to concentrate on skills, studying goldsmithing and jewelry design from 2017 to 2019 at what is now called the Design & Crafts Council Ireland Academy in Kilkenny because he was resigned to the idea that he would have to make other people's designs.

It was during the second year of this diploma course that Mr. Newman was scrolling YouTube videos and came across someone describing aphantasia. "It was like 'The Twilight Zone' where you're like, 'Wait a minute, people can see things in their head?'" he said. "I always just thought people were speaking metaphorically."

The realization he had aphantasia "changed everything" for Mr. Newman, who decided to lean into the neurological variation. "Seeing as I couldn't visualize in my own head or do things the more traditional way, I was like, 'OK, let's externalize this completely. Let's make a method outside of myself,'" he said.

He studied papers on neuroscience and researched subjects like aesthetics; graphic design, including visual hierarchy and eye tracking; pattern recognition; and the golden ratio, a mathematical proportion, so he could learn how the brain responds to certain visuals.

The information led him to develop a design system based on what he described as "very strict rules" linked to ratios. For example, he favors 45-degree angles, and everything must have a pattern — but one with no resolution.

"So your brain will keep looking at it, trying to solve the pattern, and so the longer somebody looks at something it kind of triggers desire in them," said Mr. Newman, whose key inspiration is functional systems, such as road layouts.

Mrs. Pomp called his Matrix rings, which are a reimagining of signet rings inspired by circuit boards and digital life during the pandemic, fascinating and likened them to a puzzle.

"I can imagine when someone is wearing one just staring at it endlessly, trying to figure out how it was made and trying to follow one line through all the angles and turns that it takes," she said.

As well as appreciating what she described as "the complexity of the lines" in the metalwork, Mrs. Pomp said the stones in these rings were "absolutely exquisite in the very detailed faceting of them." Mr. Newman does his own metal work, but he buys custom-cut gems that look as if they have been pixelated.

He also does metal work for other craftspeople. He sells his designs at fairs and exhibitions and has received commissions through his social media.

He is scheduled to show in London from Sept. 29 through Oct. 4, the second week of Goldsmiths' Fair, an annual selling exhibition featuring contemporary jewelers and silversmiths. The designs, which range from about 250 to 12,000 pounds ($340 to $16,205), are to include an 18-karat rose gold Matrix ring with a custom pixel-cut topaz at £9,300.

Mr. Newman said he began a design by finding a number related to his inspiration. For his first Modus Vivendi piece, for example, he was motivated by political discussions about the possibility of a united Ireland and decided to use 208, one of the reported number of border crossings between Northern Ireland and Ireland.

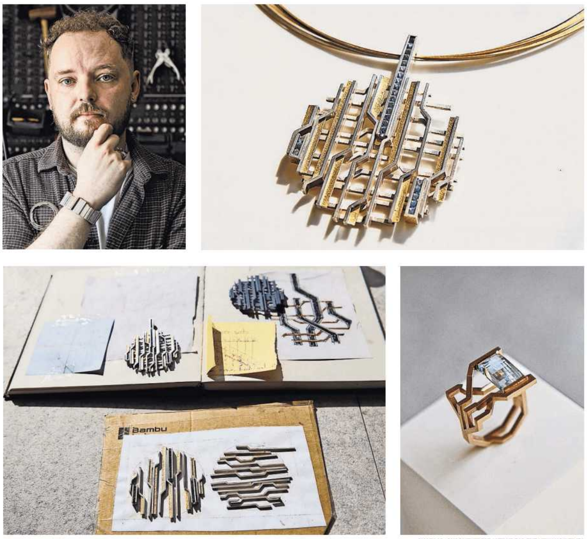
So the completed necklace pendant has 208 solder seams joining its bars of precious metals.

His notebooks are full of columns of numbers and mathematical calculations. He uses such information to plot a 2-D drawing, with the help of computer-aided design (CAD) software, and makes adjustments. He then uses CAD tools to generate a model, which he 3-D prints in resin as a visual guide so, he said, his crafting by hand is "not completely going in the dark."

Once a piece is finished, however, he has a hard time letting it go. "I'm kind of like Gollum in that way," he joked, referring to the "Lord of the Rings" character obsessed with a ring.

Yet Mr. Newman said he was proud whenever he made a new piece because it made him reflect on his struggles during his education.

Mrs. Pomp predicted that Mr. Newman had a bright future. "I think he will become one of the most important jewelers in contemporary jewelry," she said.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY THERESE AHERNE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Design
Clockwise from far left, the jeweler Mark Newman; his Modus Vivendi pendant necklace, sterling silver with 22-karat gold textured panels and topaz; an 18-karat rose gold and topaz Matrix ring; and an assortment of models, graphs and calculations for the Modus Vivendi pieces.

SYMBOLS

A life change leads to an edgy brand

A jewelry designer has combined her creativity and experience to create a talisman-centered brand that some buyers feel offers protection or empowerment

BY RACHEL FELDER

In 2009 Milka Karaagacli was working as a client services director in the Istanbul office of the advertising agency J. Walter Thompson, handling accounts such as Vodafone and the hair care brand Sunsilk.

But then "I started questioning my life and my future," she said in a recent phone interview. In her spare time, Ms. Karaagacli — who has been known as Milka Karaagacli Ince since her marriage in 2013 — began designing jewelry and bringing her sketches to Istanbul's Grand Bazaar to be produced.

When about 70 items were completed, she went to London and sold them in a series of trunk shows at friends' apartments. The collection, which she called Kismet — Jewelry & Fate, sold out. Within six months, she had left advertising to focus on her brand, renamed Kismet by Milka.

But, she said, she found that her work experience has been helpful: "I knew how to create a brand because in advertising, too, you are solving a brand's problems in a visual way."

Kismet by Milka's designs are made mostly by hand in the brand's headquarters in the Sisli area of Istanbul, about eight miles northeast of the Grand Bazaar. Much of the line includes talismans — pieces that many wearers believe offer protection or empowerment. There are, for example, collections with names such as Fearless, Protect Me, Victory and Lucky One, and designs that incorporate symbols such as evil eyes, phoenixes, lions, feathers and clovers. The reason for offering items along those lines is simple, Ms. Karaagacli Ince said: "I believe in them."

Prices in the brand's main collection range from 3,250 Turkish lira ($68) for a single 14-karat gold triangular stud earring with a minuscule center diamond to 1.4 million lira for an 18-karat gold piece with 3.76 carats of pavé diamonds that could be worn as a bracelet or a necklace. Diamonds are prevalent throughout the collection, on pieces such as a star pendant that comes in a few sizes, including an extra-large version (728,750 lira), a four-row gold band ring (346,250 lira) and a thick gold and pavé diamond ear cuff (168,750 lira).

The company, which is owned by Ms. Karaagach Ince and her husband, Deniz Ince, won't share sales figures, but said its 2025 sales were 45 percent higher than those in 2024. It now has 15 boutiques in cities including Istanbul, Dubai and London, and is also sold at retailers including Selfridges in London, Mad Lords in Paris and Bijouterie Michaud in Neuchâtel, Switzerland.

Ms. Karaagacli Ince said that her life frequently inspired her designs. The vertical lines of the Balconies collection, for example, echo the terrace railing at a family home in Bodrum, a coastal city in southwestern Turkey, that she had visited as a child. In 2013, not long after her daughter Mayra was born, she created a large gold ring with a large letter "M" in pavé diamonds; the collection now has an entire alphabet of initial rings.

In 2019, the brand introduced a collection of earrings designed to wear as part of what has generally become known as a curated ear — an array of pieces worn through multiple holes in the lobes and, frequently, in other less conventional ear parts such as the rook, the interior curve about a third of the way down the ear; the daith, the curve that juts from the face into the ear; and the tragus, the protrusion over the ear canal. Those pieces, and many that have followed it, were created to pierce ears as well as to wear in existing holes. With that type of earring in mind, the brand has added specially trained piercers to its staff in every boutique.

Initially, Ms. Karaagacli Ince said, she had a gut feeling that the appeal of multiple piercings would continue. Her instinct was correct: Consumer interest in multiple piercings, as a means of self-expression, has shown no sign of waning.

"The appeal now seems to have moved towards the idea of intentional imperfection," said Jane Collins, head of footwear and accessories at the trend forecasting company WGSN. "When you think about ear styling, it's rarely symmetrical or finished — it's something that can be continually added to. It can be rearranged, it can be individualized, so it makes jewelry feel like an evolving extension of the wearer rather than just a static accessory."

Making a personal statement is, for many fans, part of the allure of Kismet by Milka.

"A lot of customers want something that feels different from the traditional maisons, from Cartier to Van Cleef, or they want something to complement that," said Sarah Cartwright, who oversees fine and fashion jewelry, as well as a couple other categories, at Selfridges. It sells the brand in its Wonder Room, a display that includes other globally known luxury brands.

Next month, Kismet by Milka plans to introduce a new collection called the Greatest Good. The line includes pieces such as dangling earrings and chain necklaces of 18-karat gold shaped to resemble knitted fabric. Ms. Karaagacli Ince said the look is a metaphor for things in life, such as love and friendship, that take time and intention to build and to last.

Last year, Kismet by Milka opened a boutique on fashionable New Bond Street in London; Ms. Karaagacli Ince said she has her eye on Paris next. Still, she feels her brand is "a little bit niche."

"You have to understand the brand to buy it, because it's different," she said. "You have the modernity but there is always an edge. You have to be ready to be a little bit edgy if you want to wear Kismet."

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRADLEY SECKER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Styles
Clockwise from far left: Milka Karaagacli Ince, center, the founder of Kismet by Milka, inspects work at the brand's headquarters in Istanbul. Ms. Karaagacli Ince wears a collection of earrings that is known as a curated ear and other items from her brand such as bracelets and rings.

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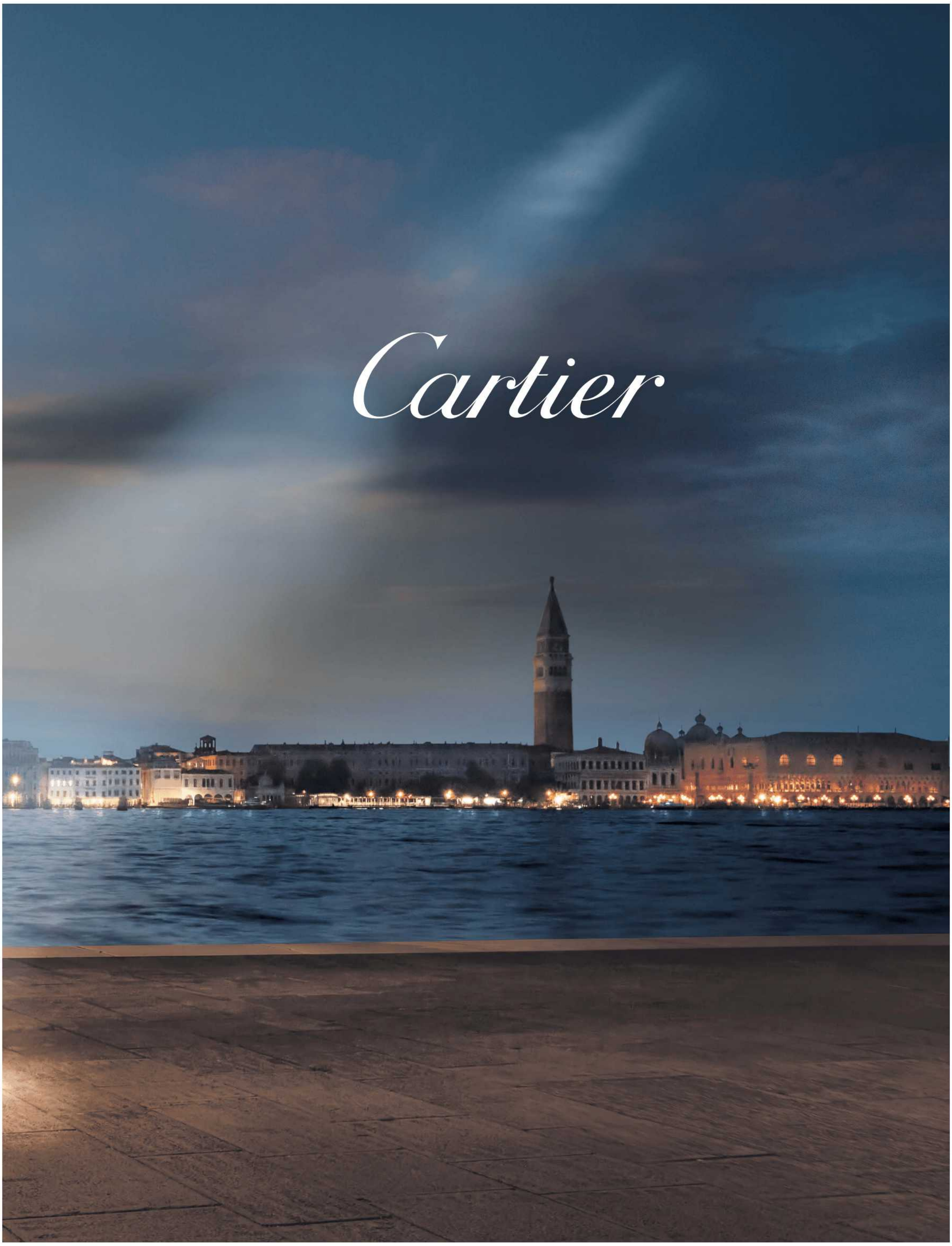

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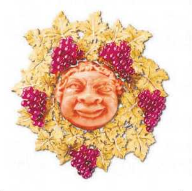
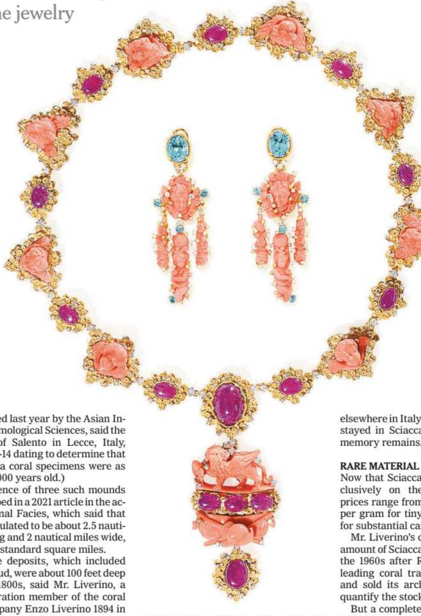
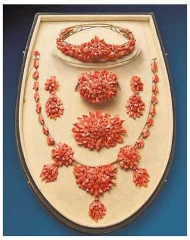
HERITAGE

A rare coral resurfaces

Sciacca coral, named for the Sicilian town near where deposits were harvested, is turning up in high and fine jewelry







BY MILENA MARTINS-ALEXANDRE

An assortment of carved pieces — cherubs, roses, a lion and heraldic symbols — enhanced several pieces in Dolce & Gabbana's latest high jewelry collection, La Divina Devozione Siciliana, presented in July in the island's resort city of Taormina.

All the figurines were carved from Sciacca coral, a variety named for the Sicilian coastal town near where the coral is said to have been discovered in the 19th century. And, "they are all antique," Stefano Gabbana, the house's co-founder and co-creative director, said in a recorded reply to interview questions. "We often buy antique pieces, we disassemble them and combine them in new creations because we like to fuse history with something modern."

The use of vintage carvings actually was the house's only alternative because, as Laurent Cartier, the chief strategy officer of the Swiss Gemmological Institute, explained in a text message, "The Sciacca coral deposit is unlike any other, it's all dead coral." And the deposits were exhausted by about 1915.

While red Mediterranean coral is the product of tiny living animals called polyps, Sciacca coral is the remains of dead polyps' hard skeletons that underwater currents, tectonic shifts and volcanic activity moved from their original locations to create large mounds in the Strait of Sicily. ("Sciacca Coral," a book written by Enzo Liverino and Cristina Del Mare and published last year by the Asian Institute of Gemological Sciences, said the University of Salento in Lecce, Italy, used carbon-14 dating to determine that some Sciacca coral specimens were as much as 10,000 years old.)

The existence of three such mounds were described in a 2021 article in the academic journal Facies, which said that one was calculated to be about 2.5 nautical miles long and 2 nautical miles wide, or about 6.6 standard square miles.

And those deposits, which included rocks and mud, were about 100 feet deep in the late 1800s, said Mr. Liverino, a fourth generation member of the coral trading company Enzo Liverino 1894 in Torre del Greco, near Naples.

"The coral at the top, the most recent layer, was red," Mr. Liverino said in a phone interview, "then in the older layers below, the coral gradually lost color," becoming orange and then pink.

Sciacca coral also had a range of patinas. While the peach-colored figurines used by Dolce & Gabbana had a satiny matte finish, other pieces display a distinct smoky look commonly called "corallo affumato," or "smoked coral." Experts say that effect most likely was the result of underwater volcanic explosions in the area.

ORIGIN STORIES

There are scores of stories about the discovery of Sciacca coral around 1875 and the so-called "coral rush" that followed.

Mr. Liverino said his research suggested the coral actually had been collected for centuries, but he still cherished the story told by his paternal grandmother, Carmela. She said the captain of a fishing boat dove into the waters near Sciacca to retrieve a pendant depicting the Virgin Mary that his wife had given him for protection and resurfaced with the precious find.

Regardless of the true origin story, Maria Concetta Di Natale, president of the Fondazione Sicilia, which promotes cultural activities, said that scores of boats, referred to as "coralline," swarmed the area once it became clear that the deposits were exceptionally abundant. And they came from every corner of Italy, she said, particularly Torre del Greco, a hub for Mediterranean coral, and Genoa, a major coral trading center.

About 14,000 tons of the material was removed from about 1875 to 1914. "Trapani, which already had established coral workshops, used some of the Sciacca coral," said Ms. Di Natale, referring to a city north of Sciacca, "but the rest went elsewhere in Italy and abroad, very little stayed in Sciacca, even now, only the memory remains."

RARE MATERIAL

Now that Sciacca coral is available exclusively on the secondary market, prices range from a few hundred euros per gram for tiny beads to much more for substantial carved pieces.

Mr. Liverino's company holds a large amount of Sciacca coral that it bought in the 1960s after Raffaele Costa & C., a leading coral trader in Genoa, closed and sold its archive. (He declined to quantify the stock.)

But a complete parure from that collection — a necklace, a tiara, earrings and a brooch — is on display until Oct. 11 at the K11 Musea in Hong Kong. The free exhibition, "Precious Coral, from Curiosity to Treasures," was organized by L'École, School of Jewelry Arts, which is supported by Van Cleef & Arpels.

Olivier Segura, the managing director of L'École's Hong Kong branch and co-curator of the show, wrote in an email that "while the exhibition covers precious coral on a broader global scale, we specifically highlight the provenance and peculiar origin story of Sciacca coral."

LOCAL APPEAL

But, as the Dolce & Gabbana collection illustrated, Sciacca coral does not appear only in museum settings.

Mario Buccellati, for example, embellished a series of necklaces with small Sciacca coral carvings in the late 1940s. And during the 1960s and '70s, one of his sons, Gianmaria Buccellati, created a series of brooches set with large coral carvings of Bacchus, the Roman god of wine, framed by vines in yellow gold, sprinkled with precious gemstones or pearls to represent grapes.

In about 2015, the New York jeweler Assael, best known for its pearl creations, used Sciacca coral in necklaces, earrings and brooches. "Everyone was fascinated by the unique story of this type of coral," said Peggy Grosz, who was the house's senior vice president and head of design at the time. "It was very appealing."

But for Sicilian jewelers, Sciacca coral holds special significance.

Laura Di Giovanna Nocito, a coral sculptor and jewelry artist in Sciacca, wrote in a text message that she used the coral collected by her family since her paternal great-grandmother's day to create pieces that had been highlighted by Homo Faber, a foundation that showcased rare craftsmanship every two years in Venice.

(Her workshop is housed in the same building as the family's Museo Nocito del Corallo di Sciacca, a museum dedicated to the coral.)

Massimo Izzo, another Sicilian jewelry artist, recently used strands of Sciacca coral beads for an opulent necklace highlighting a 390-carat morganite.

Mr. Izzo, whose work has been showcased regularly at the Elisabetta Cipriani Gallery in London, said he acquired some Sciacca coral about 25 years ago and still was fascinated by its idiosyncratic color and rarity. "It's not like diamonds that can be easily obtained with money," he said.

"I use it just for the very special pieces," he continued. "And, if I'm honest, I don't even want to sell it, because I know I won't find it again."

After a pause, he added, "For me, Sciacca coral's uniqueness is poetry. It's magic."

Nod to a god
Above right, a brooch by Gianmaria Buccellati showing Bacchus, the Roman god of wine, framed by vines in yellow gold and precious gemstones represent grapes. Bottom right, coral earrings with pearls by Laura Di Giovanna Nocito, a coral sculptor and jewelry artist in Sciacca.

Under the sea
Clockwise from center: a Sciacca coral necklace with rubies and diamonds from Dolce & Gabbana, and the jeweler's coral earrings with diamonds; a bracelet from Buccellati with coral and gold; a necklace of Sciacca coral beads and a 390-carat morganite from Massimo Izzo; and a coral necklace, tiara, earrings and brooch from the exhibition "Precious Coral, from Curiosity to Treasures" at the K11 Musea in Hong Kong.

SPOTLIGHT

A friendship bracelet, but classy

A British publicist leaves her job, rediscovers her creativity and creates a company that makes chic and whimsical jewelry

BY ALIX STRAUSS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY EMLI BENDIXEN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Three years ago, Nishita Assomull, then a veteran publicist in London, was "turning 50, going through menopause and needed to recalibrate," she said. "I was doing crisis communications, creating campaigns and telling brand stories. It was time to do something for myself."

She had long had a passion for jewelry — "My mother had a massive collection with an emphasis on rings, and I'd spend hours playing in her jewelry box," she said.

Having never designed anything before, she took a six-week online class, Introduction to Jewelry Design, through the University of the Arts London. "That taught me about drawing, sketching, rendering, researching and design, using different materials, different cut gemstones and how to present 3-D objects in 2-D," she said. "It was hugely valuable and allowed me to articulate what I wanted to make."

It also led to L'Atelier 73, a small jewelry business she started a year later from her home in northwest London, where she lives with her husband and their twin daughters, now 13 years old. (The brand name incorporates both the French word for studio and the year of Ms. Assomull's birth.)

She began by creating a website and selling the work of other designers. A few months later, when she was ready, her first stab at design was a Triple Star Necklace in 18 karat gold-plated sterling silver and accented with cubic zirconias. "I've always been drawn to celestial and protection elements — something ethereal and otherworldly," she said, adding that jewelry was a "part of your identity you never take off."

As Ms. Assomull's confidence grew, she sold less of other people's work and designed more of her own, including a gold-plated pendant with the world "love" spelled in cubic zirconias and a matching bracelet. Then came butterfly earrings and rings, and a Lucky Charms gold-plated bracelet, with heart, star, bumblebee, evil eye and key charms.

Her Bohemian collections, created last year, are what Ms. Assomull calls adult friendship bracelets, the social trend that seems to have been reinvigorated by Taylor Swift's Eras tour and that the designer felt had yet to run its course.

"I was fascinated by these simple, childlike alphabet beads and plastic charms with words spelled out," she said. "It wasn't the aesthetics, but the ritual that developed. People stacked them on their arms and swapped them with complete strangers. I loved that something handmade could have such emotional value and connection."

Each of the Bohemian Evil Eye and Amour bracelets have a central charm, a six-sided enamel plated copper barrel, accented with 18 karat gold-plated spheres, cubes and circles and strung on a thick cotton cord.

She said the designs highlight her Indian heritage. "I grew up learning that jewelry carried meaning, like the Nazar, the evil eye, or the Taweez, which are protective amulets," she said, and usually were worn on black thread.

The brand now offers almost 150 pieces, sold through the L'Atelier 73 website.

Ms. Assomull defines her designs as demi-fine jewelry, an affordable category that typically uses sterling silver as a base that then is plated in 14- or 18-karat gold and often accented with semi-precious stones or cubic zirconia. Prices range from 20 pounds ($27) for studs in the shape of bunny ears made from imitation pearls and cubic zirconias, to £850 for her most expensive item, an 18-karat gold-plated vermeil mesh necklace in her Luxe line.

"Jewelry doesn't have to be expensive," she said, "it can be slightly imperfect, and playful."

Binal Jain, founder of the custom manufacturing company Rosado Gems in Mumbai, wrote in an email that Ms. Assomull has very strong instincts about what her customer will wear and how her designs should look.

"She'll obsess over tiny details — the exact shade of enamel, the proportion of a charm, how a cord sits on the wrist — but the finished piece never feels over-designed," she wrote. "It still feels effortless." Ms. Jain, who is a gemologist, met Ms. Assomull two years ago at a jewelry trade fair in London and the women have worked together ever since.

Ms. Assomull does create a few handmade pieces in her home studio but others are assembled in small batches of 100 to 200 pieces by artisans in Jaipur, India and Istanbul. "The work is quite intricate," she said. "The small batches make pieces feel special and exclusive."

What started as a passion project has quickly turned into what feels like a success story, she said.

"I had two aims: To create something beautiful and to not lose money," as she wrote in the early days of her brand and pinned to her studio bulletin board. "I was prepared to fail. There were plenty of other companies out there, but I was convinced I had created something different, something I would want to buy but couldn't find."

Her next endeavor, she said, will focus on customized name bracelets. "People love personalization," she said. "I'm thinking of creating a gold string of connected letters using cubic zirconias with a little evil eye attached to each side."

Demi-fine style
Above left, Nishita Assomull, founder of L'Atelier73 in her home studio in Northwest London. Above, she combines elements of her Indian heritage with pop culture themes to make, among other things, "adult friendship bracelets."

The Bird on a Rock Turquoise Necklace
A tribute to the House's gemstone legacy

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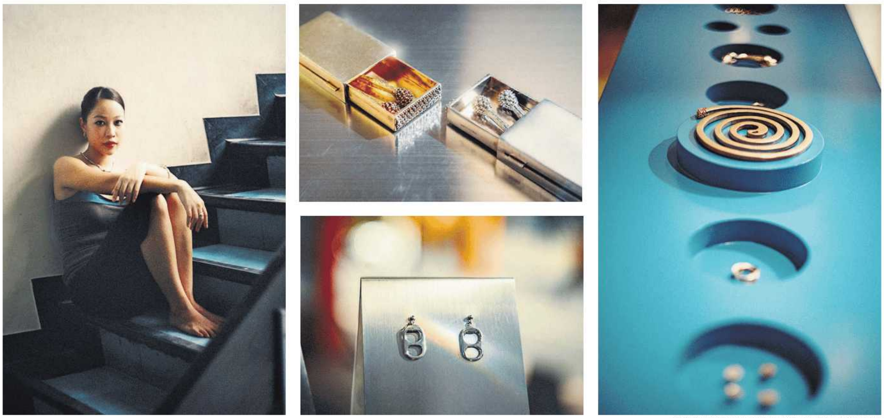
IN DESIGN

Creating jewelry that feels inclusive

The designer Pattaraphan Salirathavibhaga of Thailand stresses that adornment can be genderless and still celebrate tradition

BY DAVID BELCHER



PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID RAMA TERRAZAS MORALES FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The idea of jewelry being for everyone has played a big role in Pattaraphan Salirathavibhaga's design career.

After all, said Ms. Salirathavibhaga, 31, who goes by the nickname Nok, wearing jewelry has been part of human existence for centuries. Yet as much as she has devoted herself to this concept of inclusivity, she nearly didn't become a jewelry designer.

It all began when she was a student at the Pratt Institute in New York City."I was going to study interior design, but the classes were full so the only major that was available for me to change to was jewelry," she said. "How I spent time crafting jewelry was through the lens of an artist, so I created work that was true to myself and expressed my stories."

Born and raised in Bangkok, Ms. Salirathavibhaga graduated from Pratt in 2017 with a bachelor of fine arts in jewelry design. She returned to Thailand the following year and began devoting herself to her business full time in 2021. This experience made her realize that jewelry was a natural fit for her.

"When I changed my major, I didn't realize jewelry was a big part of my life, but in hindsight it always has been," she said. "When I was growing up, my family would give small gold earrings or small gold anklets as gifts. I always liked to open the safes of my grandma and my aunt, and so I played a lot with jewelry."

Much of her inspiration for jewelry design has been universality.

"I didn't really see it as belonging to any particular gender," Ms. Salirathavibhaga explained in a recent video interview from Bangkok. "When I unveiled my first kind of capsule collections, when I was still in New York, the first client was a male client of a male friend of mine who bought an earring."

That led her to consider imagery that would appeal to everyone, underscored by the fact that Thai culture traditionally has not defined genders.

"The term 'genderless' wasn't a label that I was trying to chase or trying to put it on my jewelry brand itself," she added. "It started as a passion project and then it didn't really need a label. I just felt like it suited the definition of genderless as my way of approaching it."

For her fall and winter 2026 collection, available now, she added a few items that celebrate her Thai heritage in not-so-obvious ways — such as the spiral shape of a mosquito coil.

"Anyone who grew up in Southeast Asia remembers putting that in front of the house in the evening," she said. "It's a bit of a nod to my heritage, and it's a really interesting shape."

Alexander Pickett, a luxury business developer who has worked with Mr Porter and Vacheron Constantin, said the designer's creations had reflected her identity.

"Pattaraphan brings a Thai traditional styling into her work, but not in an obvious way like Thai text or a religious symbol," he said in a recent video interview. "The way the styling seeps in is kind of her identity and where she's from."

He said one item that exemplified the approach was her mosquito coil design. "That spiral design is in every Thai house, every restaurant, every temple, but who would think to do that?" he said. "No one really notices it as a design, but it's beautiful."

Mr. Pickett also considered the genderless approach to be a bit radical, too.

"Most times when you see men's jewelry, it's black or traditionally masculine, but I think now the shift is to more genderless stuff," he said. "It's the same happening with watches. You find men now wearing smaller watches and women wearing larger watches. I think that kind of genderless thing floats into jewelry as well."

Bones played a big role in Ms. Salirathavibhaga's recent pieces, inspired by her own personal experiences several years ago. They did not seem to be an obvious choice, at least not at first.

"I created the bones because I was going through a heartbreak, and I went to a Georgia O'Keeffe exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in 2017 and I saw for first time her bone paintings," she said. "The bone paintings resonated with how I was feeling. The bones are remnants of your sadness and your lived experiences, your relationships."

Another Thai image she has included in her work are elephant tusks, the inspirations for her hook earrings.

"Growing up in Thailand I have always been drawn to elephants, and I visited a sanctuary in the north of Thailand when I was young, and it made a really strong impression on me," she recalled. "I wanted to take a minimalist kind of approach with the tusk. Simple and elegant."

Another favorite of hers is the Akani collection, she said. "Akani is Sanskrit for 'fire,' and I honor this with the design of matches in earrings and necklaces."

This fire image comes from her earliest memories, Ms. Salirathavibhaga said.

"I used to spend my time in my grandma's Buddha room with my twin sister, and we would try really hard to light the yellow candles, which always cooled really quickly," she recalled, referring to devotional candles. "I wanted to make jewelry that was inspired by that memory of lighting the matches."

She works mostly in silver but sometimes with gold or brass. And "gemstones slowly creeped into the collections, including white and blue topaz and red garnet," she added.

She employs seven people for sales and operations, and she outsources the jewelry making to a small independent factory outside Bangkok."I go there almost every week, so I'm pretty hands on," Ms. Salirathavibhaga said.

Prices range from $85 to $14,650, and she sells on the company website and Instagram. She also uses such retailers as Zalando, a German online platform; Printemps New York and her own Bangkok boutique in Sukhumvit, a popular tourist area.

Another favorite, though not necessarily associated with her Thai heritage, speaks more to her sense of how it all has evolved.

"One of my motifs is dice, which is something you throw and can't control the outcome," she said. "It's a gesture full of free will and faith, and I felt like my story with jewelry is probably a testament to that."

Diversity
Top far left, the Thai jewelry designer Pattaraphan Salirathavibhaga. Center top, a Pavé Akani match box with red garnets and matches, left, and an Akani match box with matches; and bottom, Pressurized earrings, designed in the shape of soda can tabs. Above, jewelry inspired by the shape of a mosquito coil. "It's a bit of a nod to my heritage, and it's a really interesting shape," Ms. Salirathavibhaga said.

FROM THE COVER

Can this city keep its gems?

THOMAS FATTORINI LIMITED

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHARLOTTE HADDEN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

QUARTER, FROM PAGE S1

experience what we've got."

The jeweler Lora Leedham, 40, makes bespoke pieces, often for repeat clients, in a tiny top-floor workshop in the quarter. She applauded recent investments in apprenticeship programs and efforts to publicize the work being created, but said that she feared for the future of the area's independent makers.

"The Jewellery Quarter is special because it's still a place where people actually make jewelry," said Ms. Leedham, who has worked in the zone since 2005. "We can celebrate its history, win international recognition and create festivals, but if the number of working jewelers continues to decline because there simply isn't enough affordable workshop space, we risk losing what makes the quarter unique in the first place." (She said workshop space now has monthly rents of about £11 to £15 a square meter, more than the £8 to £10 she paid 10 years ago.)

"Empty workshops or converted apartments don't keep the craft alive," she said. "Working jewelers do."

FUTURE GENERATIONS

Tom Fattorini, who is in his 60s and the sixth generation of his family to run Thomas Fattorini Ltd., which specializes in insignia, medals and awards, said it had been a challenge to train — and retain — skilled workers.

In the early 1900s, he said, master silversmiths and their assistants were trained largely in-house.

"This meant we could employ school-leavers at age 15 or 16, who then joined our various departments and become valuable members of the team from the get-go," eventually becoming supervisors and then training the next generation, he said in an email. "Our employees worked with us for a lifetime — 50 years was normal, and one silversmith called Harry Tucker worked with us for 60 years."

But over time, Mr. Fattorini wrote, the available number of youths declined as more people went to university and "factory jobs were no longer attractive."

"The result across the quarter," he added, "is that we are losing skills and those who are skilled work beyond retirement." Many areas of expertise, he wrote, are "in danger of extinction: The self-employed one-man-bands providing a specialty to the Jewellery Quarter's ecosystem — plating, spinning, etching, woodworking, chasing, setting, mounting, lapidary, enameling, toolmaking, diesinking — were retiring and selling up their premises to developers."

Despite the challenges, the area could be getting an uplift soon.

"Efforts have been made in the last few years to address the problems," Mr. Fattorini said, pointing, among other things, to a £500,000 grant from The Goldsmiths' Foundation, matched by additional funding, that helped create the Aston University Goldsmiths Institute in Birmingham to provide training and job opportunities.

There are also plans to draw more attention to the city as a center of jewelry making. Sophie Morris, a former curator of the Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, has been leading the team organizing the inaugural Birmingham Jewellery Biennial, scheduled for May 1-31 2027.

The event's main attraction is to be a juried jewelry exhibition at the Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery — with well-known designers such as Hannah Martin and Mimi Hoppen of Dover Street Market selecting participants — and there are plans for studios in the quarter to open up to visitors. "We're bringing the city to life with markets, workshops, talks, tours and more," with opportunities for visitors to make their own piece of jewelry, Ms. Morris said in an email.

"Recognizing the exceptional, ambitious and meaningful work of talented makers is vital to keeping jewelry heritage alive today," she wrote.

Creativity
Clockwise from top left, Dripgold Ltd., a jewelry maker for around 40 years; window shoppers on Vyse Street in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter; the interior of the quarter's JQ Diamonds; and the exterior of Thomas Fattorini Ltd., established in 1827.

THE CREATIVE SIDE

He makes ‘art to wear’

Bertrand Mak works with Kari Voutilainen and other master craftsmen to create pieces that stand out in a sea of sameness

BY TINA ISAAC-GOIZÉ

When Kieran Culkin appeared onstage in March to present the Oscar for Best Supporting Actor, he wore a rust-colored evening jacket by Paul Smith with a gold brooch pinned to its satin lapel.

From a distance, the jewel appeared figurative, a sheaf of wheat or an ocean wave. A closer look would show that it was more abstract: an upward sweep of gold punctuated by what looked like a brush mark. Called Untitled 21, the brooch had been lent for the event by Sauvereign (pronounced “sovereign”), a little-known luxury brand founded in 2020 by Bertrand Mak, a Hong Kong entrepreneur.

Its form captured a brush stroke, copied from an untitled 2021 oil painting by Zeng Fanzhi, a leading Chinese contemporary artist. Made of 18-karat yellow gold, the sweep was carved and the brush mark turned not by a bench jeweler, but by the studio of Kari Voutilainen, the master Swiss watchmaker. (In the world of high watchmaking, Mr. Voutilainen, who was born in Finland, is a superstar: In June, four of his timepieces sold at auction for more than $1 million each, and Louis Vuitton debuted a watch collaboration with him last year.) The brooch, which can be produced to order, is $39,800.

Though a young brand, Sauvereign is no stranger to the red carpet: Cillian Murphy, Kristin Scott Thomas and Maria Sharapova have worn its jewels. So have much-watched figures in British royal circles, including Zara Tindall, Lady Amelia Windsor and Lady Violet Manners (now Viscountess Garnock).

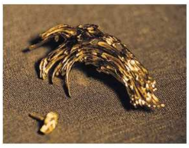
And Mr. Mak himself is hardly new to the luxury business. Having started his career at Louis Vuitton, he helped to develop the watch department at Christie’s in 2007. In 2012, he partnered with the British shoemaker Rupert Sanderson to expand the brand’s footwear into China.

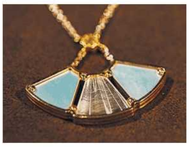
In a video interview, Mr. Mak said he drew on each of those experiences to build Sauvereign into something of an outsider proposition — a mix of jewelry, fashion accessories and objects of design made via artistic collaborations for customers who, in theory at least, already have it all.

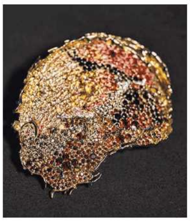
What they yearn for, he said, is cultural currency in a sea of sameness.

“Homogeneity is the biggest problem for me, personally, as a customer,” Mr. Mak said, referring to the current luxury landscape. “I’ve never been into the status quo. Craftsmanship and creativity are prerequisites, but I really believe that luxury today is about individuality and authorship. It has to be intellectually gratifying.”

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAM YIK FEI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES







Breaking the mold Bertrand Mak, far left, the founder of the brand Sauvereign, at his store in Hong Kong. He cut his teeth at Louis Vuitton and Christie’s before starting his own company. Three Sauvereign pieces, from top, Untitled 21, the piece Kieran Culkin wore onstage at the Oscars in March; a piece from the new HS14 line; and The Skull, which was inspired by a motif in a painting by Zeng Fanzhi.

It is a promising niche, said Vincent Grégoire, the director of consumer trends and insights at Nelly Rodi, a strategic consultancy and trend forecaster for the creative industries, headquartered in Paris.

“Jewelry is outperforming because a handbag is never just about the leather, and the prices are ridiculous,” Mr. Grégoire said, referring to the current disenchantment with luxury handbags.

“I call it logotomization,” he added, playing on the words logo and lobotomy.

“There’s a new extravagance, a new vocabulary emerging which creates more room for experimentation, risk-taking and propositions that are slightly more offbeat,” he continued. “If, on top of that, it’s a moment of artistic performance, that’s even better.”

During a recent phone interview, Mr. Voutilainen said his current watch orders would take the next 12 years to complete so he had stopped taking commissions. Instead, he intends to focus on projects such as Sauvereign, which open new fields of creative expression.

“The watch world can be quite limited, so exploring jewelry lets us do other things with our know-how and combine professions, and that’s what I am looking for today,” he said. “Thanks to social media, there are also more and more people around the world who want to know about the real work behind what we do. For me, it’s not commercially driven, it’s passion-driven, which is exciting and very joyful.”

Rather than compete with heritage jewelers on their home turf — with rare stones, carat weight and cut — Sauvereign seems to rely on a kind of Venn diagram of Mr. Mak’s personal inspirations. Elements from contemporary art, architecture and décor are rendered in specialized materials and techniques such as champlevé enamel and guilloché, or engine turning. The result, Mr. Mak said, is what he calls “art to wear.”

Legacy Gems, the house’s signature collection, centers on decorative metal elements with organic, convex shapes that have been embellished with accents such as 24-karat gold leaf craquelure, mother-of-pearl, jade or custom motifs rendered in lacquer by Zohiko, a 365-year-old, family-run lacquer specialist in Kyoto, Japan.

While a piece may be worn as a brooch or pendant, it also could be mounted as a clasp on the brand’s ladylike bags in box calf leather, as an ornament on a belt or atop the brand’s pointy stilettos with heels finished in 24-karat gold leaf.

On Aug. 17, the brand opened a new showcase space in the Landmark mall in Hong Kong. The 700-square-foot gallery-like boutique — set amid shops by luxury giants such as Cartier, Baccarat and Hermès — has been decorated in natural maple, satin-finish aluminum and inky-colored marmorino, a plaster made with a centuries-old technique that gives it a stone-like finish. The furniture in the shop was designed by Mr. Mak, and a new diptych by Mr. Fanzhi, called “The Crown,” hangs on the wall.

New Legacy Gem creations include three skull-shape jewels, miniature versions of the main motif in Mr. Fanzhi’s large painting “Ephemerality” (2019), set with white, brown and black diamonds, sapphires, spinels, garnets and tourmalines in gradient cuts and colors.

There also is a turquoise-hued brooch in yellow gold and champlevé enamel, silk-screen ink and gold dust that reprises part of the artist’s monumental “Nirvana” (2019) that could also be used as the handle on another piece by Sauvereign, a skull-motif cigar box in dyed sycamore, burlwood and cedar.

Also displayed is a new line of hybrid jewelry called HS14 and designed in collaboration with Mr. Voutilainen. It features fan-like pieces with a central champlevé motif flanked by removable elements in hard stone or ornamental materials. Like the Legacy Gems, the pieces in the HS14 line can be transformed from pendants into bracelets, rings or earrings thanks to some tiny pins used in watchmaking, a system that Mr. Mak said had been patented with the Swiss Federal Institute of Intellectual Property. (There also is a patent pending on an aspect of the Legacy Gems’ development, he noted.)

While jewels are his current focus, Mr. Mak said he did not plan to build Sauvereign into a jewelry maison in the traditional sense. With time and a growing roster of artistic collaborations, he said, he hoped to establish “the first Hong Kong-Asian legacy house able to outlive its founder,” spanning fashion accessories, jewelry, design objects and interiors.

Timepieces, too, are in the works. Mr. Voutilainen said he had been developing the movement for a Sauvereign pocket watch, to be unveiled in the next year or so.

The business is a bold gambit, Mr. Mak acknowledged. “But every mountain is unclimbable until someone climbs it.”

IN BUSINESS

From purses to jewelry

A Paris luxury house experiments with bracelets, rings and ear cuffs inspired by one of their most popular handle designs

PARIS

BY KATHLEEN BECKETT

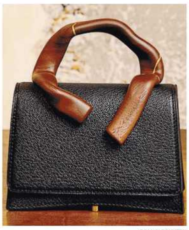
Jewelry is the latest offering of Létrange, one of Paris’s historic luxury houses. But it is an addition that likely would have never happened without the efforts of Sebastien Létrange, the most recent generation of the family involved in the business.

Some background is needed to understand the brand’s story: In 1838, Auguste Lespiaut opened a leather workshop near the Louvre Palace stables and soon became the royal saddler. By 1865, the business was renamed A. Létrange by a son-in-law and it expanded as the decades passed, adding handbags to its range of riding gear. But it closed in 2007 when an uninterested family member inherited the brand.

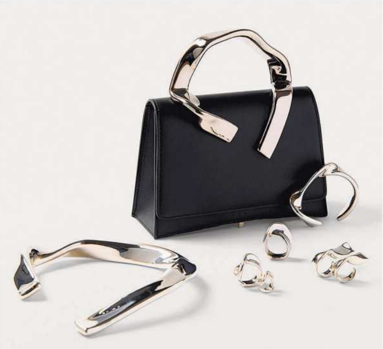
By 2014, however, “I had all the archives and I decided to start again,” Mr. Létrange, 53, said recently as he sat in the flagship on Rue de la Paix, in the fashionable Second Arrondissement. “I wanted to create the most beautiful bags in the world.”

He hired Mathias Jaquemet, a well-known leather specialist, as the house’s artistic director for leather goods. And he challenged Mr. Jaquemet, who now also creates leather goods for Louis Vuitton and Schiaparelli, to imagine what Mr. Létrange later called “a piece of jewelry sitting on a bag of leather.”

To create that handle, Mr. Létrange said, Mr. Jaquemet turned to the sculptor Constantin Brancusi for inspiration. “It took Mathias two to three years of obsessively drawing and making moldings and ceramics of 150 different prototypes before settling on what has become the iconic Empreinte model,” Mr. Létrange said.



ROMAN BONNERY



ROMAN BONNERY

LÉTRANGE
LÉTRANGE

VIA LÉTRANGE

In the bag Far left, a newer Létrange Empreinte purse, whose handle is made of walnut with seams of gold, will also soon have corresponding jewelry. Middle, the original design, with palladium-plated handle and calfskin, inspired designs for ear cuffs, bracelets, rings and a necklace. Above, a Létrange storefront in Osaka, Japan.

The first Empreinte, with a handle that looked like a ribbon of precious metal atop the bag, came out in late 2018. The handles were solid copper, plated with three microns of 24-karat gold or with palladium. And the bags came in a range of sizes and prices, from $3,920 to $1 million.

It was that “Million Dollar Bag,” as one version has been called, that eventually inspired Mr. Létrange to get into jewelry.

The handbag’s actual name was the Empreinte 178, so called because it was adorned with 178 diamonds, the number of years that had passed between the company’s founding and the start of the design process in 2016. (The 33 carats, which Mr. Létrange called a “snowfall of diamonds,” were set in 18-karat white gold and attached to a bag made from what is called Himalayan crocodile, a silvery shade selected from 50 skins to match perfectly.)

The business was hitting a stride, Mr. Létrange said — with Charlene, Princess of Monaco, buying seven bags and Saudi and Qatari princesses placing custom orders — when he thought “What if we turn what we do into jewelry?”

It seemed a natural progression to Mr. Létrange. But, he said, “when I first mentioned that I wanted to extend the line into jewelry, my advisers and investors said ‘No, don’t do it. It will dilute your focus. It’s not what you’re known for.’ ”

He moved ahead anyway, introducing bracelets and ear cuffs based on the sculptural design of the ribbonlike Brancusi-ish handle at the end of 2025. The pieces are made of sterling silver with a rhodium finish or a 24-karat gold finish, and start at 290 euros ($335 in the United States) for an ear cuff.

With one of the silver cuffs shining on his wrist, Mr. Létrange said “the jewelry turned out to be our best seller. We sold more pieces over the last six months than we did with any handbag.”

A second collection, scheduled for pre-order during Paris Fashion Week in September, was inspired by Mr. Létrange’s love of travel and one image from Brazil that stuck in his mind. “It’s from the region of Lençóis Maranhenses,” he said, referring to the national park on Brazil’s North Atlantic coast.

“I took photos, and the shape of the fresh water lagoons surrounded by sand dunes stays with me.” The designs of the new pendants and bracelets are based on those undulating circular shapes.

Another new item is a bangle made of pieces of walnut wood joined with seams of gold. “It’s inspired by Brancusi and his use of wood in his sculptures,” Mr. Létrange explained, “as well as by the Japanese concept of kintsugi that repairs broken items by rejoining them with seams of gold or silver, giving them a different kind of beauty.” Handbag handles in a similar mix of walnut and gold are also being made.

And, Mr. Létrange said, a custom piece of jewelry based on the Empreinte 178 bag is scheduled to be ready by the end of the year.

Létrange has not forgotten its roots however. The Paris store is hung with photographs of the workshop in 1889, and of Mr. Létrange’s beloved great-grandmother Henriette, who took over the company at age 42 after her husband died in World War II.

Will there be another generation to carry on when the time comes? “I have twins, a boy and a girl,” Mr. Létrange said. “But they’re only eight years old.”

CHANEL

HIGH JEWELRY

COLLECTION N°5

THE 55.55 NECKLACE IN 18K WHITE GOLD* AND DIAMONDS,
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